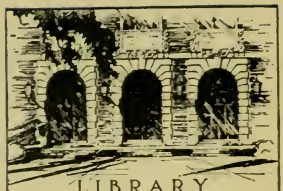

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A CHILD OF THE MENHIR

A Novel.

BY

AUSTIN CLARE

AUTHOR OF "THE CARVED CARTOON," ETC.

"Is the belief in an unconquerable Fate—an inexorable doom pursuing its victim from father to son—compatible with a creed whose God is Love? To think so were to hold a religion essentially pagan, for all its thin veil of Christianity—like that which in Brittany baptized the heathen menhirs, and built a Calvary over the place where human victims had been offered to the ruthless gods of the old world—changing the name, but keeping the nature. Fate may seem strong, but God and Love are stronger than Fate."

In Three Volumes.

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS.

R. K. JOHNSON
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BOOK VI.—THE FINGER OF FATE.

CHAPTER I.
SHARPENING WITS 1

CHAPTER II.
THUNDER IN THE AIR 14

CHAPTER III.
SIGNS 19

CHAPTER IV.
GENOFA'S CONFESSION 28

CHAPTER V.
THE GREY CROW 38

CHAPTER VI.
SAINTE-ANNE 46

CHAPTER VII.
A VOICE FROM THE MENHIR 56

CHAPTER VIII.
PARTING 63

BOOK VII.—THE KLOÄREK.

CHAPTER I.
"DOWN WITH THE BLUES!" 69

CHAPTER II.
"WHO IS IT?" 78

CHAPTER III.
ON THE BRINK OF AN ABYSS 85

CHAPTER IV.
BENEATH THE CRUCIFIX 90

CHAPTER V.
DENOUNCED 99

CHAPTER VI.
IN THE MIST 108

CHAPTER VII.
A LITTLE CALCULATION 116

CHAPTER VIII.
PAST AND PRESENT 119

CHAPTER IX.
MATELINN GOURVEN'S LITTLE SECRET 128

CHAPTER X.
UNTO DEATH 136

CHAPTER XI.
"FOR HIM". 143

CHAPTER XII.
PROBATION 156

CONCLUSION 159

BOOK VI.

The Finger of Fate.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK VI.—THE FINGER OF FATE.

CHAPTER I.

SHARPENING WITS.

Pist. "Art thou his friend?"
Henry. "And his kinsman, too."
SHAKESPEARE—"*King Henry* V.

"A LA CRÊCHE DE BETHLEHEM!" is the name and sign of a little road-side inn about midway between Auray and Carnac. A small, brown, unpretending house it is, in spite of its highly-coloured picture of the sacred manger group, which swings beside the customary bunch of withered mistletoe over the door. But, then, who could imagine a grand hotel with such a name? The little brown house is, outwardly at least, in character.

Let us enter it one June evening in the year, so-called of grace, 1792, and see whether the inside corresponds.

This also is small and brown, and dark withal, for, though it is a June evening, it is raining steadily, a thick, persistent drizzle, and the window-panes are neither

of the largest nor cleanest. A turf fire smoulders on the hearth, every now and then sending a puff of smoke into the room, which seems used to it, to judge by the uniform complexion of its contents. Nor is the chimney the only smoker. On one side of it, that next the window, sit two men on a wooden bench with a wooden table before them, smoking likewise; and every now and then removing their pipes to wash down the taste with a draught of cider.

One of these is mine host of the *Crêche*, a corpulent man, fond of gossip, who likes to drink with his guests, and savour the news with his cider.

His boon companion this evening is a thick-set young man, with straight, black hair, and sallow complexion, whom we have occasionally met before, though on previous occasions he did not wear a certain red woollen cap—rapidly becoming fashionable at that epoch—which is certainly most becoming to his style.

"Yes," he said, presently, removing his pipe and taking up his mug of cider from among the rings of that liquor which covered the table, "yes, the times are beginning to march—'*ça ira, ça ira,*' as we say—we others in Paris. We are appointing committees in every town; we are preparing the people, and giving them a little instruction; we are showing the King what the nation is, opposite to him. Yes, yes, things are beginning to march at last."

"In the towns, yes; but scarcely here-abouts, Monsieur," began the landlord; but the other took him up quickly.

"*Chut!* We say *citizen* now-a-days, not Monsieur!—we others—Citizen Adam Tonyk—if you please."

The landlord looked up hastily.

"Ah, pardon; but as Mons—— I mean the Citizen—perhaps knows, we are not so far on the march here as they are in the towns. Country people are always in the rear."

"Ah, yes," rejoined the red-cap, rather loftily. "That is what we must set right. The Citizen Landlord is, of course, one of us? I have heard of him."

Mine host looked a little scared. He glanced round hastily to see if he were observed; but the only other person in the room—a ragged beggar sitting in a far corner—seemed too far gone in cider to be capable of observation, for he was embracing his mug with one arm and supporting his nodding head with the other. Citizen Adam Tonyk followed the direction of his host's glance, but, unaware of the presence of another guest, failed to perceive the beggar where he sat in the shade.

"Yes, yes," answered the landlord, in a confidential tone. "My heart is, indeed, with the nation. The Citizen has not been misinformed; I do my little best."

"Good. Well, then, I want a little information. What are the dispositions at Carnac?"

"At Carnac?" The landlord raised his hands. "Ah, sad, sad! The people are sunk in the slough of priest-craft and aristocraticism. It is a stronghold of the old régime."

"Yes, and must be a stronghold of nationality. There are reasons." He paused a little. "Describe the situation."

"Firstly," answered mine host, touching his thumb. "Firstly, a *curé*, whom they adore, and a young priest, his pupil, one of themselves, of whom they are proud—oh, up to the skies!"

"Not there now? Surely not."

"Oh, no, proscribed — in hiding somewhere. There is a *jureur;* but no one attends his offices—the old influence remains."

"Well—and then?"

"And then? Why, secondly,"—the landlord touched his forefinger. "A seigneur, who is young and handsome, and was at nurse from infancy in the house of one of their chief farmers. He is as one of themselves."

"There now?"

"Oh, no! The chief estates are near Dinan."

"Not an *emigré?*"

"No."

"Well, at all events, priest and seigneur are not on the spot. Their influence will yield to mine."

"Will the Citizen excuse me? I doubt it."

"But why? These peasants are sheep. Who will resist me?"

"Ah! you do not know. There is the seigneur's foster-brother, hand in glove with him, and a leader among the

young men. The Child of the Menhir! they call him, and, as they say, helped by the demon! No such wrestler, no such *souleur*,* the leader of the June Feasts this year, betrothed to the richest heiress of the place, and the secret supporter, as they say, of the proscribed priests."

"Indeed! He must be removed."

"As suspect? Will the Citizen excuse me again? That would be dangerous. The people would probably rise."

The red-cap smiled a little. "Gently; I am well aware we must act gently. Things are not yet ripe for prompt measures; but there are others. Go on."

And mine host did, till he had told all he knew of Christophe's history, and of the condition of things in Carnac. He got little gossip in return that evening.

Finally, when he had heard all he wanted, the red-cap asked for another jug of cider, and the landlord, after setting it before him, excused himself and retired to attend to some business outside.

When he was gone, Citizen Adam Tomyk, ex-miller's man and *valet-de-chambre*, poured himself out another mug of cider, but did not drink it immediately; on the contrary, his thoughts seemed for the moment to be meat and drink sufficient.

In the far corner, the other guest of the *Crêche de Bethlehem* sat as erect as his cider would allow him, with eyes fixed on the red-cap. He was apparently less far

* Football player.

gone than mine host had imagined; for there was speculation in his bleary eyes, and he was saying softly to himself, in a voice which the other occupant of the room could not overhear:—

"In Carnac, is he?—the beast! Confound their low voices, and this cider which fizzes in my ears! What do they mean to do? I must know more—I must know more."

When he had said this some half dozen times, he seemed to make up his mind; he then rose, and, shambling across the floor, sat down on the seat which the landlord had just vacated. The red-cap looked first astonished, then angry; afterwards, as he observed the face of the beggar more closely, a look of half-recognition came into his sharp, black eyes, and he controlled himself and listened for what the half-tipsy klaskervara was about to say.

"Monsieur will excuse me—ah! yes, yes, the Citizen, I ought to say, 'tis all one—excuse me, anyhow, but I thought I heard you speak of one I know—of a—— that is, a friend—Christophe of the Menhir. Is it so? Is he in Carnac?"

He spoke eagerly, with an evident effort to clear his wits from the fumes of the cider. The red-cap looked at the same time curious and cautious. He examined the beggar closely.

"Well?"

"Because if he be, I can give Monsieur a few hints which will remove him quietly. Is he really there?"

The red-cap reflected a moment before answering.

"Well, yes," he said, at length.

The beggar turned pale under his dirt.

"Saint-Corentin!" he said to himself under his breath,—"just there of all places. And he knows—he is the only one. I must get him away—quietly though, and without appearing in the business, or he might turn, though I am his——"

"Will the Citizen go on with what he was about to say?" asked Adam Tonyk, seeing that the beggar pondered long.

"Ah! yes, yes; but let me see." He scratched his long matted locks,—"yes, yes, it is in the interest of the nation that he be made to withdraw quietly. Monsieur might hint that he knows something of his antecedents—some disgrace in the north,—no, in the west, I meant the west."

"Ah! that reminds me," said the red-cap suddenly. "The seigneur of Carnac and the seigneur of Kerdec'h are one and the same, are they not? Yes, yes, I know. The old Count was murdered, you know—this is the young man. I think, then, that I am acquainted with some of the Citizen klaskervara's antecedents, too. The Citizen knows the Château de Kerdec'h? He can give me some useful information. We have met before I think."

A look, half-astonished, half-scared, came into the bleary eyes. He struggled against the fumes of the cider, but with only partial success.

"I must use him, I must use him," he murmured,

with a look of clouded cunning, but I must not betray myself.

"We have met before," repeated Adam, more decidedly.

"I cannot recal that honour," replied the beggar.

"No? Well, I will help the Citizen's memory. The Citizen was a pillawer in those days; I was of the household of M. le Comte de Kerdec'h, as he called himself. The Citizen klaskervara hated the Count—for reasons, of some of which I am aware; I, too, hated him, for reasons likewise—filial ones, chiefly; I am a good son. There was a little transaction in cast-off clothes——

The red-cap had given vent to these utterances slowly and distinctly, pausing between each, about a second, to mark the effect, to watch the blood ebbing and flowing in the face before him. He now broke off altogether, and gazed quietly at his interlocutor.

The klaskervara seemed in great trepidation. Large drops broke out on his forehead and his breath came fast.

"Curse him!" he murmured, *sotto voce*, "it is the Count's valet—the very same. 'Twas my evil star led me to him. May the saints help me out of this, and I will repent—I will repent! Curse this cider, how it muddles my poor brain!"

"Yes, there was a little transaction," continued the other, keeping his eye steadily upon him, "or rather there *was* to have been; but the Citizen klaskervara had more

important business still with the Count: very private business, which obliged him to meet him alone."

Again the red-cap paused to watch his victim, thinking to himself as he did so—"It's only a surmise, but I believe I'm right, he *looks* like it; and if I be—well, the man's in my power. He knows something unpleasant about the De Kerdec'h's, or I'm much mistaken, and the sooner that family's down, the better for me and the nation. Good! his eyes drop—he winces. Now for another turn of the screw." He leaned nearer to the klaskervara. "He knew the Count was to ride unaccompanied—I told him so—so he determined to meet him, and—" another pause—"next morning the Count was found *dead!*"

With every word, the beggar had become more and more ashy pale, except only when a look, more keen than before, during one of the terrible pauses, had brought the blood to his face with a sudden rush of dread anticipation. But the very shock and terror of the moment sobered him, and as the fumes of the cider abated, his cunning returned. He seemed to make a rapid calculation; then he also leant on the table and fixed his eyes on the other.

"Just so," he said, still somewhat thickly, but in a steadier voice,—"just so. The Citizen valet seems wonderfully well acquainted with the details."

The red-cap was rather taken aback; he had not expected such a rejoinder.

"Then you remember me now?" he asked, a little inconsequently.

"I do," answered the beggar, in the same tone; "and that reminds me—*I* also know something of the Citizen's antecedents. The Citizen was once a miller's man, but was dismissed—for reasons. He then entered the service of the Comte de Kerdec'h, where he was when I had the honour to meet him. There *was* to have been a little transaction between us; but, as *they* say, the Citizen valet was discovered extending the transaction to his master's wardrobe, and was rather summarily dismissed from the castle. This was on the Tuesday evening. They *do* say the Citizen valet is better informed about the Count's last moments than most people, but——" He paused and looked at the red-cap. His first shot had told, but the latter fell harmless.

"*Ça, ça,*" rejoined the red-cap, with a look of relief. "'Twas *said*, but 'twas found false. Tell, me, friend, why you have laid aside your flourishing trade, and lain perdu so long? Tell me why you were riding your old horse so fast through the lanes that night, while your boy——"

He stopped suddenly; pushing forward in the dark by the aid of a very few beams of light, another seemed to have dawned on him. His face lighted, and he was about to speak again, when the beggar broke in, in a half-desperate voice—

"My boy! Citizen valet, *that* is where the shoe pinches.

I will be candid—alas! I suspect him. *That* is why he must be got out of this neighbourhood. I never told him that the Count was father to his foster-brother, and he might betray himself. Citizen valet, I trust to your honour."

"*Hum*—" the red-cap reflected—"*hum*, then this Christophe is *your* boy?—your son?"

"Alas, yes!"

"And what was the grudge—supposing that your suspicions are correct?"

"The grudge? Alas, poor boy, an insult to me, his father!"

"*Hum*—and the cause? Doubtless connected with the little interview in the yellow cabinet. Stone walls have ears, Citizen."

The klaskervara was again at a disadvantage. "An eavesdropper," he thought. "Yet we spoke low. How much does he know, I wonder?" Then aloud, with some dignity:—

"Honour forbids some disclosures, Citizen, and when one knows little, it is better to be silent to chance acquaintances."

So much aloud; then, *sotto voce:* "There *may* be money in the secret yet, though I am not at present in a position to tell it where it would be of value. Cautious, my friend; he doesn't know much, that's clear. Ah, that affair of Saint-Samson was a false step! and

so, I fear, was this evening's conversation. Curse that cider!"

The red-cap, on his side, reflected also, and his reflections led to the conclusion—"*Wait.*"

"Well, my friend," he said, at length, "I honour your reserve; but, if the nation required it—and the nation would know how to pay if it did—you would, I am sure, speak freely. Meantime, we are agreed—the lad Christophe must beg ot quietly out of the neighbourhood! We both have our reasons, and will work in concert—eh? You may trust me; I am a confidential agent for the *Comité Révolutionaire* in Auray. You are a good patriot, of course—I know it. Now for the hints you promised me. Don't fear, no violence will be used—that would be impolitic at present. So, speak low—stone walls have ears, Citizen klaskervara."

Five minutes later the landlord was heard returning, and the beggar went back to his former seat.

"I hope no harm will come of it," he thought, rather uneasily. "'Tis the cider's fault if there do, not mine. Well, he will do my business for me, anyhow, and I haven't let out a word of truth, thanks be to Saint-Corentin!"

"Not a bad evening's work," soliloquised the red-cap. "But I must keep my eye on that fellow. I wonder how much of what he told me was truth? Well, that remains to be seen, and I must set myself to find out. Yes, yes, 'tis a delicate business, and the committee

have done well to employ me—few have such talents for detection and diplomacy as I. Only remember, Adam Tonyk, my friend, that there is more besides the Republic to remember here—there's that secret to find out, and my revenge to take on those bloated aristocrats !—there's the murderer to discover and the reward to gain ! No, I mustn't forget that it's a triple game I have to play, and I mustn't be too precipitate. Slow and sure wins the day, friend Adam.

" Here, then, Citizen Landlord, bring me another mug of cider !"

CHAPTER II.

THUNDER IN THE AIR.

"Death, Fear
. . . . Are mixed in the atmosphere,
Which trembles and burns."
SHELLEY:—"*A Vision of the Sea.*"

THERE was thunder in the air of France. Dark clouds were gathering overhead, spreading from the size of a man's hand, till, like threatening wings, they overshadowed the whole of her sunny sky. Paris was seething and muttering round the last remaining shadow of Monarchy, and Europe was mustering her armies and drawing near for the coming slaughter.

Cathelineau, the wool-dealer, was raising the white standard in La Vendée, and throughout Maine and Brittany the proscribed priests were exhorting their flocks in secret to stand firm against the storm of rebellion and unbelief, which was almost ready to burst.

The country people listened; but the towns, for the most part, followed the fashion now becoming so general throughout the other parts of France, and donned the red cap of Republicanism.

As yet, however, the country was tolerably quiet; only

in the towns the first heavy drops had begun to fall. But all felt the oppression; all, even the most ignorant, looked at the clouds and listened to the distant mutterings.

In Carnac, little retired Carnac, grey and antiquated as her menhirs and dolmans were, men went on their way pretty much as usual. There were no red-caps there yet, nor white flags either. The people might have ignored the portents altogether had it not been for their religious feelings. But the removal of their priests still rankled. They also, though slightly, compared with more stirring places, and felt that there was thunder in the air. There was an uneasiness, a feeling of expectation; though what they feared, what they expected, not one in ten could have clearly told.

In such a condition of the social atmosphere even the smallest things become important; and so it was that the appearance in Carnac, about the end of June, of a new inhabitant was much more commented upon than it would have been under other circumstances. The new-comer, notwithstanding, was of singularly quiet manners and ordinary appearance. He was of middle height, apparently of middle age, for his hair was gray, and, so far as the people could make out, of a middle grade in society; for he was plainly no aristocrat, and yet he had more polish and education than was then usual among the peasantry.

He rented a small cottage in the village, which had stood empty for some time on account of a dim

suspicion of ghosts, and set up the trade of a barber. He seemed to have seen something of the world, and to have travelled even beyond Paris, for he could tell the villagers many things which they wanted to hear; and he told his stories in such a pleasant way, and with so much respect to his audience, that he soon became a welcome visitor in the farms and cottages. The men liked him, for he shaved well; the women liked him, for he was handy at binding up cuts and wounds, having, as he told them, once lived in a surgeon's household; the girls liked him, for he imported "the newest Paris fashions in coiffure," as he said. Was he for the King or the new idea? That they could scarcely tell as yet, for he was cautious in politics, and seemed to keep a wise middle path. "Let us keep quiet. Do not let us hurry," he said to the peasants; and the peasants, who were cautiously inclined, and, for the most, easy-going souls, agreed. "One must be careful how one risks one's little all," they were wont to reply; and the barber—Barber Postik, as he called himself—approved of their wisdom.

In few households was the barber better received than in that of the Comorres. Ninorc'h found his advice so soothing in the many cases which fretted her; and he recommended to her a concoction of herbs, good for the heart-burn, which suited her better than anything she had taken before. He was able, too, to alleviate the rheumatic pains of old Perik Guenedon, and for this

Yvonne was grateful, though the girl had taken an unaccountable prejudice against him at first sight, which she found it hard to get over. Ninorc'h was especially touched by the way in which he spoke of his old mother "now in Paradise," to whom, as he said, he owed all his knowledge of herbs. Genofa was delighted with him. He dressed her golden hair for her in the most becoming fashions, and regretted once or twice, with delicate flattery, that she was not going to be a duchess, or, at least, a countess, that she might wear it in powder, as the great ladies did. Surely it was a pity to bestow so much loveliness on a peasant lad? But, then, he was handsome —ah, yes! he hastened to add, as he saw Christophe's pretty betrothed look a little displeased. He almost wondered that, with such a face, Mademoiselle's intended had not made himself a priest—it would have made his fortune in certain quarters. Had he never had the intention? Genofa was a little startled. She did not know. What made him think so?

The barber fancied he had heard the thing mentioned; but probably he was mistaken. Perhaps it was because Monsieur Christophe had the air of a priest—he looked so—so *grave*. And then he turned the conversation.

With Christophe also, the man did his best to ingratiate himself. He flattered him; he tried to gain his confidence; he was always professing to be his friend. Yet he made little progress, and met with but small return. The Child

of the Menhir was reserved to a fault, and was never one to care for strangers.

"As soon try to get anything out of the menhirs themselves!" thought the barber. "We must try another dodge."

CHAPTER III.

SIGNS.

"Suddenly was blended
With our repose a nameless sense of fear;
And from the cave behind I seemed to hear
Sounds gathering upward!—accents incomplete."
SHELLEY—"*The Revolt of Islam.*"

THE halcyon days of the old fable were but of a week's duration; those of our pair of love-birds, Christophe and Genofa, lasted in unclouded beauty for nearly a month. Then the calm which brooded over their life's sea began to be ruffled. Very slightly at first—just a breath waking and dying away in the heaven of their bliss; just a ripple furrowing the glassy surface of the depths of their content, and then sinking out of sight again; just a word here, a misgiving there, the source of which they hardly observed; that was all. Yet, as the days stole on from June into July, the breaths became more frequent and the ripples spread; the halcyon time was closing. Could it be otherwise, with that thunder in the air? The birds themselves, though no meteorologists, feel instinctively the approach of a storm; and so it was with our two halcyons, little as they, absorbed in each other's love, cared to trouble themselves about politics. Barber Postik was the man for that; the

inhabitants of Carnac learnt more about the new views from him than they had ever done before, cautious as he was in giving his opinion. Was it the thunder in the air which was weighing on Christophe, bringing a sudden gloom over his face, if certain subjects were but mentioned in conversation? What could it be which silenced the laugh on his lips, and quenched his smile at the very name of Bernèz, or an allusion to the sufferings of the proscribed priests? Why was he so loth to cross Carnac plain, even in broad daylight, or to pass the cemetery on his way to inquire after old Perik Guenedon?

Genofa asked herself these questions with a little troubled surprise, as she saw the gloom settling down more darkly upon him, and felt that a sort of moody abstraction was gradually withdrawing from her those lover-like attentions which made up the chief brightness of her life. And yet how loving he sometimes was!—how passionately he would take her hand and draw her to him, when the mood had passed and he observed the wistful look in her sweet blue eyes! It was not that his love was lessening—she was convinced of that. What could it be? Had he met with a soul? She remembered once remarking to him, in the first days after his return, that he had the look of one who had had such an encounter. It was said in jest then; yet it made her shudder now.

Tears sometimes dimmed the girl's bright eyes, as she knelt at night before her Crucifix and prayed for her lover's

happiness, and that it might be granted to her to make his joy, for she felt that success was slipping from her.

And what was it which was troubling the lad's new-found bliss? Just the word here, the hint there, which "gave him to reflect," as the French say; which stirred again the scruples love's spell had laid to sleep. Only this at first; but incidents more palpable followed, signs which took a terrible hold on the natural superstition of the young man, and gradually poisoned the springs of his peace.

The first of these occurred one day when he was crossing Carnac plain. As has been said, it was always against his inclination that he did this, the associations connected with it being apt to call up uneasy thoughts; but his foster-father had sent him on an errand to Auray, and he could not object.

It was a sunny afternoon; cloud and sunshine chased each other over the wide extent of thymy grass, and the breeze blew in from the sea, fresh and salt and healthy. There was nothing ghostly there; nothing but the ever present Druid stones, lying and standing about the plain like the skeleton remains left, after some battle of the giants, to whiten in the sun and wind. In going, Christophe avoided the tall menhir where he had been found, making a considerable detour to escape it; but as he came back he fell into a muse, and his steps led him without thinking along the little path which skirted its foot. When he was

within thirty or forty paces, something—was it the wind? or was it really what it sounded like?—a deep groan under the ground—made him stop suddenly. With a feeling as though something terrible were near him, he raised his eyes, and saw the tall menhir before him, rising, dark and colossal, against the glowing background of the evening sky. The sun was setting like a crimson ball, barred with clouds steeped in flame and orange colour. A blood-red light, reflected from the sinking orb, flushed all the east, and bathed the plain in crimson. The tall menhir before him, usually so grey and cold in hue, appeared as though stained with blood.

Was it only the sunset light which gave that strange colour to the stone?

Christophe asked himself this, with a cold feeling at his heart as he looked at the other menhirs, and compared the rosy hue on them with the deep red stain on this. If so, why had the crimson run, as it were, into the shape of—was it, could it be?—a great red cross?

With a sensation, half of fear, half of curiosity, he approached the menhir; something seemed to draw him to it whether he would or not, and when he was near enough to distinguish local colour from mere reflection, he stopped again and looked more closely.

Sure enough, a great cross stood out blood-red on the grey face of the stone!

What could it mean?

Impelled by a terrible curiosity, Christophe went up quite close to the menhir which they called his father, and touched the cross with his finger. It came away stained and sticky, and Christophe sickened with horror, for it seemed to him that the very air around the menhir was tainted with blood!

He closed his eyes, and staggered up against a neighbouring stone, and before his mind there rose, in all its awfulness, the scene by the Menhir of Saint-Samson.

"Shall I never escape it—never, never!" thought the lad, with a terrible shudder; and then he opened his eyes again, for the remembered scene was more full of horror than the present one.

"'Tis a sign," he murmured, with a sigh. "My happy days are over, and the Demon has sent this to show that he is about to come after me again! I——"

He started violently, for again came that awful sound, and this time it seemed to come from the ground at his very feet.

"My God!" was the voiceless exclamation of the wretched lad. "It is his blood!—his blood crying from the ground!" and, in an agony of superstitious fear, he hurried from the spot, without once pausing to look behind him.

Had he done so, he might have seen a face, not unlike that of a demon in its expression of fiendish malignity,

look from a neighbouring dolman, while a voice hummed, *sotto voce*, the song of the Paris mob—

"*Ca ira, ça ira!*"

Next day, a peasant also observed the red cross on the giant of Carnac, and a crowd of curious sabot-shod labourers went to view it.

They also took it for a sign, though they interpreted it differently from what Christophe had done.

"'Tis war!" they whispered, "'tis war! Barber Postik is right; there is trouble coming. May the Saints keep us in it!" Christophe heard this interpretation, and was a little comforted.

The sign, may be, was a public, and not a private one. He would wait and see. But the dread was there, and deepened daily, as other omens followed.

Strange blue lights were seen in the cemetery chapel; and, as in former times, the people began to whisper that the Devil was preaching there again to a congregation of the Dead. Once it happened that Christophe saw the light.

He had gone one evening on an errand from Ninorc'h to carry some little dainty to old Perik Guenedon. He had found the old man very ill, and Yvonne had asked him to fetch Barber Postik. The Jack-of-all-trades was out, and the neighbours directed Christophe to La Petite Saint-Michel, where he was said to have gone. When at last the barber was found, Christophe was still detained to

give assistance, and, finally, sent by the stranger to fetch a bundle of herbs from his cottage-garden. It was in returning that the lad observed the blue lights in the cemetery chapel; and, stopping to gaze with that strange fascination which the supernatural exercises over some people, holding them riveted to the spot in spite of their terror, he heard his name repeated three times. Then there was a pause, followed by these awful words :—

"Fate follows. Escape, or thou art lost, body and soul!"

Then the lights went out suddenly, and the lad was left in the luminous twilight of the summer's night.

It was with a strong effort that he controlled himself sufficiently to continue his way to the Guenedon's cottage to deliver the herbs to Barber Postik; but when he got there, the man was gone. He could not wait longer, Yvonne said, and had left directions how she was to use the herbs. He gave them to her in silence, and it struck her as strange that he did not return her "good night." In fact, the lad could not; he was almost frozen with horror, and his mind was in a whirl of dismay.

After that evening he was more gloomy and distracted than ever; yet even this did not drive him from Carnac. Whither should he go? He had no other home, and his love for Genofa was as fetters on his limbs. He *could* not wrench them free from that sweet bondage, to place himself under the heavy yoke of the priesthood; that yoke, so

congenial to Bernèz, seemed to him as an iron halter, which would eat into his very soul, if once he bent his neck to it. He could not resolve upon it; and yet there were times when his superstitious fears worked so upon his morbid conscience that he felt as though fate were becoming too strong for him, and that he must yield or go mad. Then, again, would come a little respite, and Genofa's eyes drew him irresistibly the other way.

As for the poor girl herself, she became daily more puzzled and unhappy. She was always watching her lover's face and trying to discover what was wrong; and that face, that effort, came before her and disturbed her even at her prayers. Was he really putting her in the place of God, and suffering vengeance for so doing? Had he really relinquished the priesthood for her sake? Barber Postik had hinted as much; but Christophe would give her no reply on the subject; he repulsed her so roughly when she tried to question him, that she trembled to recur.

Even bluff Antonn Comorre began to remark that all was not well. More than once he had surprised his darling in tears, and he looked at his wife and shook his head.

"Ninorc'h," he remarked, at last, after revolving the matter in his slow-going mind, "I begin to fear that there is something uncanny about this lad. To begin with, he was found under a menhir, and thou knowest what is said about those stones! Nothing wholesome is fathered by

them—that I have always heard. May be he's a *poulpican*, after all. Dost remember the story of Catherine Cloär and the changeling she brought up as her own? And even if he *be* the son of Mattelin Gourven—wife, that's a villain, if ever there was one! Holy Saint-Corneille! I misdoubt me about this match! Ah, if I could but consult a priest!"

CHAPTER IV.

GENOFA'S CONFESSION.

Love, which sanctifies all other hearts,
In mine is—sin."

W. SAWYER—"*Ten Miles from Town.*"

THREE days passed. The weather was heavy and damp. The sun seemed to have gone under some cloud, which so muffled its rays that the people began to look gloomy and to prophesy a bad harvest. Old Perik Guenedon's rheumatism came back severely, and he took to his bed.

"I fear the old man's going down," said Barber Postik, when his decoctions failed of their former result. "Have you thought of procuring for him the last offices?"

"Ah, Heaven! yes," answered Yvonne, with a sigh.

"But how? Our priests are chased away, and my grandfather would sooner die alone than have the *jureur*."

"Naturally," answered the barber, in a sympathising tone; "but you have a brother who is a priest?"

"Yes. But he is proscribed."

"You know where he is?"

The girl looked at him suspiciously.

"And supposing I do?"

"Will Mademoiselle trust me to take a message?"

"Holy Virgin, no! It might be bringing him to his death. He might be seen and betrayed. Ah! no; I cannot sacrifice Bernèz."

"Then you will let your grandfather die without the last Sacraments? Has Mademoiselle thought of the risk? Excuse me, but supposing he died in a state of sin, his perdition would be on your conscience! And the priest, your brother, what would *he* say? Would he take your fears for him as an excuse? Scarcely."

He spoke earnestly and eagerly. The girl was impressed, and felt a twinge of remorse for her prejudice against him. She was frightened, too. Supposing what the barber said was the case, would she not be sinning against the old man and risking his soul? She pondered; her face leaning on her hand, her clear, grey eyes fixed on the face of the old man who lay in an uneasy dose. Presently he stirred, and murmured something. She bent down to listen. It was the name of her brother.

"May I really trust you?" she said, going up to the barber, and looking earnestly at him. The man's face did not change. He returned her look steadily.

"You may," he said.

"You will promise not to betray him?"

There was a wistful anxiety in the girl's eyes which would have made it hard for a man to meet them who intended, deliberately, to betray her trust. But Bernèz was not at

present the barber's object, so he answered her without an instant's hesitation :—

"So far as I am concerned, he shall come and go in safety—for this time, at least," was his mental reservation.

"Then I will give you a note for him. You will lay it within the furthest dolman on the plain between here and Auray—possibly he may get it that way—I know no other means. I would not ask you if I could go myself. But there is the old man. I dare not leave him just at present, and you say it were well not to lose time."

"Certainly not. Then I can do nothing but carry the note to the dolman? An uncertain post-office, I fear."

"It is the only way," returned the girl, almost sullenly.

"She will not trust me further," thought the barber. "Well, 'twill do for the present. Adieu, Mademoiselle," he added aloud. "And will Mademoiselle remember that I am always at her command?"

"Thank you," was the girl's short reply, and she wrote a line — (thanks to her klöarek brother, she was more lettered than most country maidens of her time)—and gave it him.

"Have I done right?" she thought uneasily. "I am afraid, afraid!" She clasped her hands together with a passionate gesture, not usual with her calm, quiet nature, and let her head sink for a moment on her bosom. The old man called to her from the bed, in a feeble, quavering voice. She ran to him, and stooped tenderly over the pillow.

"What is it, grandfather, dear? Bernèz? Yes, yes, he will come, if I can fetch him. Go to sleep again, dear, and try to wait patiently. See, I will smooth the pillows. And see, there is great-grandmother's Crucifix; I will hang it where thou canst see it. Be patient, dear; the good Jesus will know how to help us."

She moved the ancient Crucifix to the wall opposite the bed, and as the dim old eyes turned to the Figure they had known from childhood, she kissed the faded cheek gently as a mother would have done. The old man's crippled hand tried to raise itself to her head. She knelt and guided it for him; and, as the murmured blessing fell from the aged lips, the girl's heart, sore with the aching of love unreturned, and heavy with the anxiety of fears undefined, gave way suddenly, and she laid her face on the pillow and wept quietly. They were the first tears she had been able to shed since that meeting with Christophe in the lane, when the hawthorns were in bloom.

"Ah! God, help me to serve them all, and then it will be well," she prayed silently. "Lay what Thou wilt on me, so long as they may be safe and happy!"

Would Bernèz come? If he ever got the letter he surely would; she knew that, at whatever risk to himself; but that risk weighed upon her, and what to wish, she scarcely knew. Meantime the anxiety was terrible. When, on the second night, she lay back in her grandmother's old arm-chair to try for a few moment's sleep, her heart beat so

painfully that slumber long refused to come. At length her weary eyes closed and she fell into a troubled doze. The old clock ticked steadily, the breeze rustled in the leaves outside, and from the shore came the eternal murmur of the sea.

Suddenly another, and less continuous sound was added to the rest,—the tread of a step on the stones of the village street. It ceased, and then came three knocks at the little casement, round which the honeysuckles twined. Yvonne started up immediately.

"It is he!" she said, and moved to the door. "Coming, Bernèz," she murmured softly, adding for precaution's sake, before she drew the bolt,—"It *is* Bernèz—is it not?"

He answered with his priestly greeting, then came in, and put his hand on the head of the girl, who knelt to him, after the reverential fashion of the Breton peasants to every priest, be they kin or stranger.

"Oh, Bernèz!" gasped the girl, "they say he is dying, and I could but send for thee, though I fear—I fear——"

"Hush, sister!" said the grave voice of the young priest, "we are all in the hand of God! Will he see me to-night? —the old man, I mean."

"He is sleeping; and thou, too, must need rest; I will call thee if he wake."

He looked at her closely, for there was a weary sound in her voice.

"Poor child!" he said, more tenderly than usual, "'tis thou who needst it most. Go sleep, and I will watch."

"I *could* not, Bernèz."

There was something almost passionate in her tone; plainly her nerves were overtaxed. He saw it, but was far from guessing at all the reasons."

"Come, then," he said, soothingly, "we will talk a little first, and then thou wilt rest. Tell me, what of Christophe—is he here still?"

"Yes."

The colour rushed to her face at the sudden mention, and then left her pale as one of the white roses which bloomed beneath her Crucifix. But the young priest was thinking of other things, and did not notice the change.

"Does he keep stedfast?" he asked.

"Stedfast—what to? Ah, yes, I know. But 'tis different now; he has to think of Genofa."

"Of Genofa?"

The young priest turned to her with a startled look.

"Yes. They are betrothed. Hast thou never heard?"

"No."

There was a long silence. The face of the priest was convulsed between grief and stern displeasure.

"Thou shouldst have hindered it, Yvonne," he said at last.

"*I?*"

She turned aside and left the room hastily, to hide her tears.

When she returned, her brother was on his knees before the Crucifix. He knelt long, and she took her beads and told them beside the bed. When he rose, he was calm again.

"It must not be," he said quietly. "I must see him to-morrow; or, if that cannot be, then Genofa. Thou wilt help me, Yvonne, for I must not show myself abroad."

"Yes. But, Bernèz," she added hurriedly, "they love each other so much. Dost thou not think that there are some—perhaps;—I mean that marriage is as much a vocation for some as a life vowed to celibacy is for others? Dost thou not think—"

"Hush, child! thou art speaking of what thou knowest not."

He spoke sternly, and she was silenced. Presently there was a movement on the bed.

"It is grandfather," said Yvonne; and they both rose and went to him.

The old man was eager for the sacred offices, so long withheld. He was in haste to make his simple confession—the easy confession of an aged man, who had clung to the faith, so far as he knew how, with all the simple earnestness of the Breton peasant, all his life, and had now for years been beyond the capacity for committing any but the most trifling derelictions. It was pathetic to see his reverence

for God's ambassador in the person of his grandson ; to see the positions of youth and age, hoary grandsire and youthful descendant, reversed between these two ; the old man becoming the humble penitent, the young man the awful dispenser of pardon and peace, through the power of the sacred office with which he was invested.

The dawn was stealing through the little casement, and the morning air shaking the perfume from the creamy trumpets of the honeysuckle, when Bernèz summoned his sister to kneel by the bed, while he celebrated the last Sacraments and murmured the prayers for the dying, so that the old man might not miss what, perhaps, could not be his when death should really come. Very quietly the old peasant closed his eyes when all was over. He was contented now, and could die in peace.

"Now, Bernèz, go into the hay-loft and sleep," whispered his sister. "I have had my rest as much as I need it, and thou wilt be safe—no one will seek thee there."

"And thou wilt bring Christophe, or Genofa, this evening? I must be gone before to-morrow's dawn, and I must speak to one of them first. Only tell no one else, Yvonne, unless indeed there be sick ones in the village?"

"No, there are none. I will do thy bidding, Bernèz."

* * * * * *

It was evening again, when a light step stole up to the door, and a hand knocked softly for admission.

It was Genofa.

She came in alone, looked round the hay-loft with a half-frightened gaze, and knelt to the priest for his blessing.

"Then Christophe has not returned?" asked Bernèz.

"No. He left at daybreak on business in Quimper, and he will hardly be back before to-morrow," answered Genofa, in a hurried voice, adding timidly—"You wished to speak to me, my Father? It is well. I have been wanting to make my confession; I have been hoping that Father Clemènçz——"

"Father Clemènçz is in exile. He was too closely watched for it to be possible to remain in the neighbourhood But speak to me, daughter, I will hear you first and then— Leave us, Yvonne."

Yvonne left the hay-loft where she had appointed the meeting with Genofa, and the young priest and his girl-penitent were alone together.

But no grey-haired Father could be more austere, more insensible to the beauty of the lovely maiden who knelt before him, than was Bernèz—such things had no charms for him. He listened with stern gravity to the childish omissions, the little sins of vanity with which the confession began; but when the girl came to the history of her love, and of the doubts and scruples which were distressing her, his face took an expression of almost painful attention. Yet he heard her in silence to the end, sternly repressing the impatience which the sobs and shudders interrupting the narrative evidently caused him.

When she had finished, he said very gravely:—

"Daughter, it was just of this I wished to speak. This marriage must not be."

Genofa looked up with a wild expression in her lovely eyes; then, at the sight of the stern, unbending face of her confessor, she covered her own with a stifled cry.

"It must not be," repeated the priest. "Nay, ask not why, there are reasons enough against it. First, he is vowed to the priesthood—you were right about that; and—but enough, the marriage would be a sin!"

She looked at him again with her blue eyes wide, her red lips blanched; then she sank down at his feet with a moan.

"Daughter," continued the priest, with increasing severity—"You must put an end to the affair at once—*at once*, I tell you. Heaven's curse would——"

He stopped suddenly, for the girl had fainted.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREY CROW.

"With them a corbie, ash-grey for eld,
And a young crow, aye, at her side beheld."
—"*Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*"

GENOFA Comorre scarcely knew how she got home that evening. She had a dim perception of Yvonne's supporting arm, and of a tender voice murmuring caressing words in her ear. She had sufficient sense to understand the injunction that she must say nothing to anyone of Bernèz Guenedon's presence in the village—at all events till he was gone. Just sense enough to complain of a headache as an excuse for taking no supper; then she crept to bed and crouched under the clothes like a wounded animal. Next morning, almost to her own surprise, she found that she could rise as usual; nay, even discovered that she must have slept, or at all events, lain unconscious, for she had no perception of how the dark hours had passed. She went about all that day doing her accustomed work, with little to show the stunned and bleeding condition of the life within, for she felt that her first words on the subject must be to her betrothed, and she was resolved by no outward sign to provoke the questions she could not answer.

Poor little Genofa; not many would have credited her with so much strength; but love is a great upholder, the greatest perhaps next to religion, and it works wonders sometimes, even on the weakest natures.

One comfort only the girl possessed—she faintly hoped that her lover might have reasons for his conduct, unknown to the priest; and she felt dimly thankful that her swoon had kept her from making any promise which would bind her, before she had heard what her lover had to say.

When evening came, she went down the lane by which Christophe must return. She wanted to see him at once, and alone; for to meet him with father and mother looking on, and no explanation possible, was, as she felt, beyond her powers of endurance. The day had been a fine one. The sun had shone out once more, and was still resting with a golden glow upon the little patches of corn which bordered the road. Great trails of large white convolvulus and honeysuckle garlanded the hedges, and, in the grass, the white stars of the stitchwort stood like a flowery constellation. There was a hush in the air, a quiet so great that the voices of the little herdsmen on Carnac plain could be distinctly heard, at considerable distances, calling the cattle home.

All outside was calm; but Genofa's heart was beating painfully, and even the cool touch of the dewy evening could not allay the fever in her blood. More than once she started violently at the light stir of a bird in the

bushes, thinking it was the tread of Christophe's horse coming down the road; and when at last the unmistakable hoof-beats were heard in the distance, she stood still and gasped for breath. He rode round the corner on the old white mare, with the evening glow on his face and a happier look there than it had often worn during the last few weeks; and when he caught sight of Genofa, the dark eyes lighted with pleasure, and he sprang from his horse and came to meet her with outstretched hands.

"Genofa, sweet one, hast then come to meet me? Thou hast missed me, then, little one?"

She answered with a sob, and threw herself passionately upon his breast.

A look of mingled surprise and terror came into the lad's face.

"What is it then, Genofa? Tell me, dear— Ah, God! what can have happened next?"

But she was trembling so that she could scarcely stand, and he had to draw her down beside him upon the hedge-row bank, and soothe her tenderly, before she could even speak. The old white mare was taking her supper on the lush grass which grew at the other side of the road; and the sound of her *browze, browze*, was all that broke the deep stillness of the mellow July evening which reigned around them. At last the girl found voice.

"They say we must not marry, Christophe!" she said, quiveringly.

"*Who* says so?" He asked the question with a rough defiance, which made the girl start as she sat there with his arm around her.

"Bernèz!"

"Bernèz!" He repeated the name with a sort of gasp, adding quickly, after a moment's pause, "is *he* here? Speak, Genofa, tell me all, for God's sake tell me all, and quickly."

Then, as well as she could, the girl told her story, with averted face and many a falter, saying as she finished, in a broken voice, and with a hurried glance at her lover :—

"And is it true, Christophe? Can we really never marry?"

But the lad did not answer. He had hidden his face in his hands, and his breath was coming in laboured gasps.

Genofa was terribly frightened. She seized his hands and tried with childish violence to draw them from his face; but he rose with a muttered oath, which made her cross herself in dismay, and began to pace rapidly up and down the narrow lane in front of her.

The girl looked on in utter dismay, her blue eyes wide with fear, the tears chasing each other slowly down her face.

"Oh, Christophe!" she sobbed, at last, quite unable to contain herself any longer, "Oh! Christophe, *do* tell me what it is all about? Didst thou *really* promise to be a priest?"

At the sound of this piteous appeal the lad started

stopped his walk, and came and stood opposite to where the girl was sitting. There was a hard, fierce defiance on his dark face, which frightened her still more.

"Yes, I did," he said, scornfully; "that is, I promised Bernèz. But what business is it of his? Has not a man a right to change his mind? Has he not?—come, answer me!"

"Yes, that is, if— but thou knowest they say that *that* promise should never be broken, that— Oh! Christophe, he said something about a man putting his hand to the plough and looking back! He said—he said I should be leading thee away from——" She burst into tears.

The lad stamped his foot, and a strange expression passed over his face, a look in which tenderness and exasperation struggled.

"Ayol! ——" he muttered, using a Breton oath, "what business had Bernèz to meddle? May the Horned Angel——"

"Ah, hush! for heaven's sake! hush, Christophe!"

"And thou wilt forsake me for *that*, Genofa? For a resolution made before I had half discovered what thou wert to me?"

"But, alas! even that is not all," moaned the girl. "He said there were other reasons—that——"

All the flush of anger faded from the lad's face; his eyes dilated, as with fear, and his lips blanched.

Genofa looked at him in dismay.

"What?" he said, with an effort—"what else did he tell thee? For God's sake——"

"Nothing, nothing!" exclaimed the girl, in a disturbed voice. "Ah, Holy Virgin! do not look so, Christophe!"

But as she spoke his face relaxed, the blood returned to it, and he drew a long breath. He came back to the girl, sat down beside her, and put his arm round her pretty little figure.

"Genofa," he said, entreatingly—"Genofa, sweet friend, do not, then, cast me off for nothing! What is altered since thou didst promise to become my wife? Nothing. And for the tyranny of one priest wilt thou take thy sweet love from me? Ah! Genofa, I have so few to care for me, and I cannot stay here otherwise than as thy husband. Have pity!"

She nestled to him with an involuntary gesture, then started away.

"But, Christophe, if it be to lose our souls?"

"Nonsense! If Father Clemènçz were but here, I am sure he would counsel otherwise. Bernèz can see no good outside the priesthood. Only say thou wilt wait a little before deciding, sweet one. May be Father Clemènçz will come back, and then——"

She started to her feet and twisted her hands in anguish.

"I dare not, I dare not!" she exclaimed, in a voice sharp with suffering. "Heaven must be displeased with us already; I have long feared it. Thou hast looked so

strange, my friend, so strange; and three days ago I saw a grey crow* upon the gable—Ah, Holy Virgin! there it is again!"

She put her hands before her eyes with a cry, as a hooded crow flew across the road with a hoarse croak.

Even Christophe looked alarmed. This omen, coming at such a juncture, sent a creeping sensation through his veins. But his passion for Genofa, his fear of losing her, was stronger for the moment even than his superstition. He jumped up and seized her hands in his.

"Look here, Genofa!" he said, urgently, with a sort of wild desperation, "if thou wilt not consent, at least, to let things remain as they are, till we have a chance of consulting Father Clemènoz, or some other priest besides Bernèz, I will go away and kill myself. As sure as we stand here, before Heaven, my death will be at thy door!"

"No, Christophe, no, no!" exclaimed the girl, clinging to him in uncontrollable terror. "Oh! I will promise anything—anything, even if—"

She shuddered, for again came the croak of the home-going grey crow through the still air.

But Christophe would not let her have time to reflect. He covered her hands with kisses, called her by all the

* A bird of ill omen in Brittany, where, according to an old legend, it is supposed to be possessed by an evil spirit. A common New Year's wish is as follows:—

"Bonne année à vous, garçon;
Point de souris dans la maison
Ni corbeau gris sur le pignon.

endearing names in the Breton vocabulary; lifted her on to the old white mare, and the two turned homewards together. Yet, though both tried to hide it from each other, there was a dark weight of presentiment upon the heart of each.

CHAPTER VI.

SAINTE-ANNE.

"Sainte-Anne bénie! du fond du cœur nous vous prions; conservons-nous en grâce maintenant et pour l'avenir.

* * * * * * * *

O sainte patronne! dès qu'un désastre menace le monde, nous nous rappelons ton pouvoir et nous implorons ton appui, la face tournée vers la tour de ton église."

Chant des Arzonnais.

THE above conversation between the lovers took place a few days before the 24th of July, on which day, as every Breton knows, is celebrated the Pardon of Sainte-Anne d'Auray, the chief pilgrimage in Brittany. Every one goes there from all parts—every one, that is, who has a vow to pay, a petition to ask, a sin to expiate, or a profit to gain on those who have.

For the inhabitants of Carnac the distance was an easy one, and the greater part of the village was in the habit of attending it every year; and even this year, though there was a constitutional priest installed at Saint-Anne, the people were not inclined to forego what was a noted fair and social gathering, as well as a religious pilgrimage.

"Was not Madame Sainte-Anne still there?" they asked. "Even if she had a *jureur* to serve her, and would she not listen to the prayers of the faithful just

the same? Besides"—it was whispered—"might there not be a proscribed priest among the crowd to whom a penitent might confess? As for the jureur, let him say what offices he liked, no Christian was obliged to attend to him if his conscience forbade it."

So argued the people, and Antonn Comorre and his wife did not dissent. They were uneasy in mind about their daughter's match, and anxious for the chance of consulting a priest about it. Genofa, too, was intent on trying what the chief Saint of Brittany could accomplish for herself and her lover. So uneasy was the poor girl since her interview with Bernèz that she had even resolved —a hard thing for her—to cut off her beautiful golden hair and offer it at the shrine, that the Saint might have pity on her and smooth her path of true love.

Farm work would, of course, be at a stand-still on the *fête*, and so Christophe also was to attend the Pardon in turn with an old labourer employed on the land, who was to keep house during his absence. Genofa and her mother were to spend the night with relatives in Auray and return next day.

It was the eve of the Pardon. Already a crowd of pilgrims from all the four bishoprics were wending their way through the lanes and across the *landes* on their way to the holy place. Among them you might see scores of different costumes, from every part of the old province, worn by people marching, weary-footed and dusty, to pay

their vows. Those of high degree were in the minority—the great bulk were peasants; but there were hundreds, nay, thousands of these.

Keeping rather apart from the crowd, choosing the more obscure bye-ways, and evidently anxious to escape observation in the gathering twilight, were two persons whom we already know. One was Barber Postik, otherwise Adam Tonyk; the second was apparently an aged beggar, with long white hair and a hoary beard; but this disguise need not conceal from our readers that he was Matelinn Gourven, klaskervara and ex-pillawer.

"And so the long and the short is that you have failed to dislodge him as yet," the beggar was saying, in a subdued tone, to his companion. "Have you tried—you know what—the last resources?"

"Not yet," replied the other, also in a cautious key; "they are still in reserve. But I shall have to use them, I fear. They are expecting the family at the Château—the whole of them, and this link between the aristocrats and the people must be cleared away at any cost before they arrive!—that is——"

"Ay, at *any* cost!" repeated the klaskervara, with emphasis. He had started slightly on receiving the news of the expected arrival, but had checked himself at once.

"If the worst come to the worst, we must give the young Count a hint of what we suspect, and have the fellow

arrested!" continued the agent. "But you do not recommend violence?"

"No, certainly not, unless ——"

"Yes, yes. Unless nothing else will do—I understand. Now, if I could but detach him from Mademoiselle Genofa," continued the barber, meditatively, "it would serve my turn well; but she loves him with such inconvenient strength. Will Marie Laurent be at the Pardon, I wonder? Scarcely, I fear." The last words were spoken inaudibly.

"Look here, Citizen Klaskervara," went on the revolutionary agent, after a pause, "you had better make a clean breast of it. We should accomplish so much more if we did but understand each other thoroughly. I feel sure you are keeping something back."

"I protest, Citizen, I protest!" exclaimed the beggar, vehemently, in ill-concealed alarm. "Though he is my son, I scarcely know —— But if I can only find out, I am sure all would be safe with—with Monsieur—that is the Citizen ——"

"There, there, I can wait—I shall know in time," interrupted the other, with scarcely concealed contempt, while the klaskervara thought rapidly—"*Shall* I tell him a part? Oh! if I only knew whether it would ever be worth anything to me again! 'Twas a fatal step that killing the goose which laid the golden eggs! No, I will *not* tell him—not yet, at all events. Monsieur Citizen," he continued,

aloud, if you could bring him across Carnac plain this evening—if you have played the card you know of and failed, I might help, and—— By the holy Saint Corneille! our Carnac patron, I will sacrifice my feelings and see the lad myself, if the business be not settled by to-morrow. It will be terrible for a father, for he avoids me as though I were a disembodied soul; but anything to get him away from danger."

The agent laughed scornfully, and the men parted company at the next cross-roads, the beggar doffing his hat to the great Crucifix which stood there, and drawing a *sous* for his age and piety from a group of women going to Sainte-Anne d'Auray, who were just passing by.

It was not quite such a gay or such a well-attended Pardon as usual—the presence of the jureur, celebrating the Office on the great open-air tribune, instead of the priest they were accustumed to, prevented that, still more perhaps than the stories and rumours of political troubles which had scarcely yet touched the country people of antique Brittany. Yet the large, steep-roofed church was still there, with its sacred fountain, and the miraculous image of Sainte-Anne, discovered by the peasant Nicolasik in the 17th century, had all its inherent sanctity. Picturesquely-dressed groups of peasants were solemnly marching round the sacred enclosure, carrying the symbols of evils, from which they believed themselves to have been saved by the miraculous interposition of the saint. Storm-tossed sailors carried

their offerings of model ships; cripples their discarded crutches; sick men, lately recovered from the jaws of death, dragged their winding-sheets after them.

By the sacred well in a corner of the churchyard lay the blind, the maimed, the halt, waiting to drink, or to bathe themselves in the waters from which the apparition of the Virgin's Mother had risen for her interview with Nicolasik. At a stall by the church door a brisk trade in votive candles was going on; and within knelt scores of pilgrims absorbed in their devotions. Among them, on her knees before the shrine, was Genofa Comorre, a perfect agony of supplication on her fair child's face, which, with both her slender hands, was uplifted towards the image of Sainte-Anne. Before her on the pavement lay the shorn locks of her long yellow hair, and now and then she stooped and lifted the shining offering towards the image of Brittany's chief patroness, as though pleading for a hearing by what it had cost her such pain to dedicate. A long ray of coloured light slanted through the stained window overhead, and threw rose tints on the snow-white cap and the lovely little face which it framed; on the pretty embroidered bodice and the clasped hands. Genofa was praying very earnestly, so earnestly that now and then the whispered words were audible.

"Ah! blessed Sainte-Anne," prayed the child. "Blessed Sainte-Anne, bless him and bless me! Thou art so powerful, pray for us that Heaven be not angry. Smile

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on us, holy grandmother! do not let the wicked spirits harm us. Guard us ever. And, oh! grant that he, my Christophe, may be saved and be happy, now and for ever more! Ah! madame, hear me,—hear a poor child; and if thou wilt but answer my prayer! Oh! we will give thee such a beautiful offering next year!" She looked up at the face of the image as she said this, and the tears which trembled on her own long eyelashes made her think she saw a smile across them on the face of the Saint; and with a lightened heart, she rose and went out.

On first passing from the dim church into the brilliant sunshine, she could scarcely distinguish anyone. The crowds of gay costumes and eager faces seemed to swim before her in a glittering haze. But presently above the din, she thought she heard the tones of Christophe's voice, and looking up she espied him standing under one of the churchyard trees, talking to a stranger girl, whose piquant beauty at once attracted her attention. She wore the close cap and black dress of the Morlaix *paysannes;* but even that Quakerlike costume could not subdue the rich tints of her blooming complexion. The hues of the damask rose glowed through the clear olive of her skin, giving to each round cheek the most charming freshness. Her lips were as scarlet as a pomegranate, and her laughing black eyes flashed and sparkled under the darkest of fringed lashes and the most delicately pencilled of arched brows. She wore a knot of scarlet poppies in her breast, and another

of the blood-red flowers was stuck coquettishly behind her ear, contrasting well with the primness of her snowy cap.

She seemed speaking to Christophe with gay familiarity, and the lad himself was smiling, as if in spite of himself, at her gay talk.

Little Genofa stood in the shelter of the church-door watching them wistfully. She longed to listen to what they were saying ; but, strain her ears as she might, she could not catch a word.

We, however, will use our privilege as spectators and eavesdrop a little.

"And to run away like that!" the girl was saying, with mock reproach. "To leave me behind in the fair, waiting forlornly for my dance! Ah, *coquin!* how shall I punish thee?"

"Nay, 'twas thou who threw me off for another dancer," returned Christophe, scarcely knowing whether to take her in jest or in earnest. "Thou art very fickle, I fear, Mademoiselle Marie."

"Fickle? *Hein?* Ah, well, Monsieur Klasker, two can play at that game, *hein?* "Now, I dare to wager, thou hast found another sweetheart, and that she is here at this very Pardon?" She looked round, as though seeking some maiden to pounce on, and Christophe's heart beat a little uneasily. "Come, thou wilt introduce me to her! No? Ah, well, shy one, I shall know how to find her presently. Say, then, Klasker, *why* didst thou

run away so suddenly? Dost know what they all said at Morlaix?"

"No."

"Well, that thou wast a thief, and hadst been discovered by my brother-in-law stealing the corn! Ay, and Bénéad himself believes that 'twas thou, and nobody else; and faith, it looked like it! Fie, fie!"

"Mademoiselle, surely you told them——"

"What? No, no, dost think I was going to defend a run-away? No, no; though I *will* say, I didn't believe it."

"Of course not, when thou knowest——"

"Hush! My brother is here somewhere. Thou hadst better keep out of the way, for if he sees thee, there may be mischief! Ha, ha, ha! what a sheep the big fellow is; why he's vanished again—run away once more, I vow!"

She laughed mockingly to herself, for Christophe, unwilling to have a scene with the miller, had pulled his hat over his brows and plunged into the crowd.

The maid of the mill was still looking after him, when she felt someone touch her on the shoulder, and turning hastily, perceived a man with iron-grey hair, in a costume, half peasant, half bourgeois. She stared at him without recognition; but he bent close and whispered somethiug in her ear.

"Adam!"

"Yes, Marie. But, hush! I am not Adam here!"

"Ah! Ad—*Ciel*, I forgot! But, tell me, where hast thou

been all this time? Holy Virgin! I thought thou hadst forgotten me!"

"Forgotten thee, Marie?" He looked at her with a softening of his harsh face—"No, not that. But thou knowest, I must earn money before I can claim thee. I have a good place now, and—Ah! let us only wait till the aristocrats are down—there will be fine pickings, and thou shalt be a lady, sweet friend. But come, thou canst help. Dost see that girl of Carnac, by the church-door—the pink and white thing with the pale skin?—Yes, that is she. Well, she is the sweetheart of that lad who was talking to thee just now. Speak to her, Marie—make her jealous—make her give him up if thou canst."

"But why?"

"We want him away for political reasons. He will go at a word from her."

"It is not—Ah! Adam, thou art not deceiving me? Thou dost not love her thyself?"

"I? Marie, I swear— But come, *canst* thou think I could have such bad taste? A washy thing like that, when there is my damask rose!"

The girl smiled, well pleased.

"Well, I will do my best, since thou wishest it," she said,—"but we shall meet again?"

"Ay, this evening—in the church."

"Good." She greeted him with her most brilliant smile, and sauntered through the groups towards Genofa.

CHAPTER VII.

A VOICE FROM THE MENHIR.

" Et je venais sur la route, ne songeant à aucun mal, ne songeant qu'à ma plu aimée, quand j'entendis quelqu'un invisible, qui me criait d'un ton menaçant :—

' Quid quietem quæris
Cum ad laborem natis sis ?'

" Et moi, je restai un moment debout, éperdu, et le sang glacé dans mes veines.

" Et la voix répéta encore :—

' Hunc mundum miserum relinque.
Hunc mundum miserum relinque.' "

—*Aventures d'un Jeune Bas-Breton.*

The July afternoon was drawing towards its close. The church and churchyard had lost many of their occupants, when Barber Postik found himself standing again under the great sycamore where he had talked to Mademoiselle Marie. His eyes were fixed on the door of the great church in hopes of seeing the girl appear, for he was anxious for news of her undertaking.

Presently he leant forward and his face became eager; for out of the brown twilight within came two figures whom he recognised as those of Christophe and Genofa. They stopped by the *bénitier* at the entrance, each dipped a finger in the water and handed a drop of it to each other on the tip. Then they signed themselves, took each other's hands, and looked into each other's faces.

A ray from the westering sun was on them, and the man under the sycamore could distinctly see the intense look of passionate devotion on the face of the youth, and the wistful, half-questioning, half-tender expression in the sweet eyes of the girl. He said something which seemed to re-assure her, for her face lighted into a smile of tender trust. Then they kissed each other, as they thought, unobserved. The girl returned into the church and the youth walked swiftly towards the churchyard gate.

"She has failed," thought the spy under the sycamore; "there has been a little difference only, and they have made it up again. I must play one of my reserved cards." He turned and followed Christophe into the road.

The lad walked on rapidly in the direction of Carnac, so rapidly that the barber had much ado to overtake him. He did so, however, and hailed him in a loud cheery voice.

"Whither away, Monsieur Christophe?"

The lad looked round. "I am going home," he said, shortly.

"And I also—at least part of the way," returned the barber. "I have to see a sick person across the landes, and return to Sainte-Anne afterwards. Come, our roads lie the same way, let us walk together."

Christophe allowed the other to join him without demur; for, though he had no special love for the barber, a companion across the landes where stood the Druid stones was not unacceptable, especially towards evening.

For some time the conversation turned on the events of the Pardon, and such like general matters; but presently the barber introduced the subject of the De Kerdec'h family, and their approaching arrival at Château Coëtmor.

"They have not been here much, I understand?" he asked.

"No," answered Christophe, "only the young Count; his father and mother have never been here in my memory. Their chief château is somewhere near Dinan."

"Indeed; and how did they come by the estates here?"

"The late Madame de Kerdec'h was the sole heiress; they came through her."

"And the late Monsieur de Kerdec'h, her son—what sort of a man was he?"

"I hardly know; I never saw him. It is the young Count I know so well; he was here almost entirely as a child, and scarcely knew his father."

"Ah, just so; 'tis a custom with the aristocrats to make the peasants bring up their children for them. That was a sad thing about poor Monsieur de Kerdec'h's death," he added, after a pause, with a keen look at the lad.

"Was it? I know he died suddenly; but I was away from Carnac at the time, and when I returned the talk was over. In fact, I do not much think it is a thing they like to speak about. Some disgrace, I fancy—a duel, was it not? I never thought to ask."

"A duel! No—a *murder!*"

He said the word with slow emphasis, and looked again at the lad.

Christophe started. "How?" he asked, quickly.

They had struck off from the road, and were treading the short springy turf of the landes. The sun was getting low, and was throwing long, oblique rays of crimson across the grass. Against the glowing west, the first detachment of menhirs stood out dark and solemn, as they rose gradually into sight. The barber had his eyes fixed on them, and gradually slackened his pace as he drew nearer. He seemed to be trying to recollect something, for he did not immediately answer. At last he turned towards his companion:—

"I will tell you," he said slowly. "I was living in the neighbourhood at the time, and heard all that was to be heard, and that was not much. Poor Monsieur de Kerdec'h was riding home at night-fall. He was unaccompanied and had a large sum of money on him. The Countess expected him about eight o'clock, but he never came. Next morning his horse was found without a rider, standing in the snow at the entrance gate. Search was made, and the Count was found, lying murdered at the foot of the great menhir of Saint-Samson!"

During the whole recital the barber had kept his eyes fixed upon his hearer's countenance. There he had read, as in an open book, the anxiety, horror, and paroxysm of fear which the lad was powerless to conceal.

"He has done it," said the revolutionary agent to himself, as Christophe, at length awake to his observation, turned his face aside. "I half suspected the klaskervara, but I do believe he has spoken truth after all."

"And the murderer?" asked the lad, at last, bringing out the words with a gasp.

"Was never discovered!" finished the barber. Silence for some minutes.

The light air which stole inland from the sleeping sea seemed to roar in Christophe's ears, the ground at his feet seemed to be slipping from under him. Only with the strongest effort could he prevent himself from falling, as he stumbled on by the side of his companion.

"No, he was never discovered!" continued the barber, after a long pause. "In these days justice is none too alert in France, even when it is an aristocrat who is the victim. If it happens to be a *peasant*—faith, they're far too many as it is, and if one be snuffed out a little before his time, *tant-mieux*, say the aristocrats—it's a mouth less to feed in these scarce times. But to return to our sheep. A hue and cry was made, but little or no wool was the result. Footsteps were observed about the menhir, but it had snowed again during the night, and they were nearly obliterated. There *was* a whisper in some quarters about a pillawer and his son; but whether it were one or the other, or both or neither, there was no proving, especially as these gentry are never stationary, and were no longer to be

found. In fact, there were folks who said they had left the country the day before, and had been in Guingamp before the murder. Ah, well, heaven knows, and to heaven we must leave the revenge. Murder will out, they say."

A sort of convulsive shudder passed over the lad. His face was disturbed and bloodless; he walked on as though quite unconscious of his companion's presence. The latter continued to observe him closely for some moments; then he raised his head suddenly and listened intently. A long, low whistle, like the call of a plover, sounded across the landes; it came again. Christophe took no notice. The barber paused a moment; then, as though weary with the silence, began whistling a popular air.

They were now within a very short distance of the first detachment of Druid stones. A little footpath, leading to a few fishermen's cottages by the shore, led off to the left. On reaching it the barber stopped.

"Our ways part here," he said. "Good evening, Monsieur Christophe."

The lad roused himself, made some sort of mumbled rejoinder, and the two separated.

Christophe went on, in a state of such mental disturbance, that he was quite incapable of thought.

"*His* father, *his*—— Oh, God! Only this was wanting!"

He kept saying the words over and over to himself,

hardly knowing what he said. It was the simple outcome of the anguish within. Clouds were rising and obscuring the light of the setting sun; a sort of premature twilight was settling down over the wide surface of the solitary landes. The menhirs stood up gaunt and awful in the dim light, and over all reigned a great silence.

Suddenly, as he was skirting the first group, hardly heeding the presence of the great stone which superstition connected with his origin, a low, muffled cry seemed to rise from the ground at his feet. The lad stopped as though he had been shot, and trembled from head to foot. Again came the strange, weird cry, and—was it really so, or did his excited fancy make him imagine it?—words seemed to shape themselves in the sound.

"Fly! Fly!" the voice seemed to say. "Vengeance pursues. Fly! Fly!"

And the lad did fly. Fled, as he had done two years before, in wild, unreasoning terror!—fled, till the voice, the Druid stones, the landes themselves were left behind him and he sank, breathless and exhausted, before one of those tall Crucifixes which guard the cross-roads of Brittany; as though only at the foot of the Cross could he find a refuge from the fate which so relentlessly pursued him. Raising both hands towards the silent Figure, he cried aloud in an anguished voice—

"A priest, my God, a priest!"—then fell fainting on the stones!

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTING.

"You and I
Must never, never, never join hands so!
Nay, let me say it—for I said it first
To God, and placed it, rounded to an oath!
Far, far above the moon there, at His feet,
As surely as I wept just now at yours—
We never, never, never join hands so!"

R. BROWNING—"*Aurora Leigh.*"

THE twilight of the next evening was falling without anything having been seen of Christophe at the farm. Antonn Comorre had grumbled much on coming back that afternoon and not finding him there. Ninorc'h was just a little anxious; but it was no unusual thing for lads to be late home from a Pardon, and anxiety had not risen yet to any great pitch concerning the absentee.

Genofa alone was restless and troubled, with a restlessness which would not let her settle to anything. She took up one piece of work after another, only to drop each in turn to look out of the window towards the road by which Christophe ought to return. She knew that he had intended last night to go straight back to Carnac, and she could not help connecting his prolonged absence with Marie Laurent and her confidences of the day before. Had he really once been in love with her, as the pretty

Morlaixnaise had said, and had she, perhaps, enticed him back again? True, Christophe had repudiated any love but for her alone, when, disturbed by what the girl had heard, Genofa had taxed him with it the day before; but they *did* say men's words were little to be trusted in such matters. Nor was this all that was troubling the little maiden. A note had been put into her hand that morning by an ancient beggar as she knelt, to make her parting prayer, at the shrine of Sainte-Anne. He had whispered that the sender was Dom Bernèz, and the message of the utmost secrecy and importance. Not being able to read it herself, she had carried it to the village scribe, Barber Postik, who, after swearing perfect silence, had deciphered the two lines contained in the note:—

"My daughter—stand firm! Break off this marriage for his sake and thine, or everlasting perdition may be yours!"

That was all. No name was signed; but it had been enough to re-awaken all the girl's uneasy scruples. Moreover, she had again, three times that day, seen the ill-omened grey crow.

All this together had so worked upon the young girl's mind that, after a long prayer before the Madonna in Carnac Church, she had almost come to the conclusion that, for both their sakes, it was right that she should give her lover up. She was now waiting, in trembling, for his return, rehearsing the parting over and over again with ever increasing agitation.

It was about nine o'clock. She had gone into the dairy by her mother's orders to finish some of her neglected work, when she heard the sound of the garden-gate opening and shutting, and the well-known step upon the path which led to the back-door. Hardly knowing what she meant to do, she went and stood on the dairy threshold. Christophe saw her, and, coming straight towards her, took her hands.

With a terrible sensation that the effort must be made now, or strength would fail her utterly, Genofa whispered brokenly—

"Christophe! Christophe! we must part. It is not God's will that we should marry, and I — cannot fight against it any longer!" The last words came out with a helpless gush of tears.

He did not take her in his arms, as, perhaps, she expected, to soothe her fears, and plead against them. No; he continued to hold her hands quite quietly, and without showing the least surprise, or dismay, answered in a hard, even voice—

"Thou art right. I came to say the same. I see plainly that Fate is contrary to it, and we cannot fight against that. I am going to be a priest. Farewell, Genofa!"

"Christophe!"

The girl gave a gasping cry, and tried to fetter him with her arms. With the unreason of love and anguish, now that he was accepting—nay, had forestalled her resolution

—she desired to recall it. But the lad gently unclasped her arms, and put her from him.

"It *must* be, Genofa!" he said, resolutely. "We must part! See, I will tell thee"—as he saw her gasping efforts at inquiry. "I have been to see Bernèz, and he unconditionally approves. No seminary is open just now; but a friend of his—a seminary priest—has retired with several kloäreks to one of the uninhabited islands, and is carrying on their education in secret. Bernèz has given me a letter to him, and I go, Genofa—I go! Do not try to keep me; God knows how hard it is!"

"But Christophe——."

"No, my sweet foster-sister! (for this is all thou canst be to me). No, Genofa; do not try to stop me. Wish them good-bye for me, Genofa — the foster-father and mother who have been so good. Bid them pray for me, and——" His voice broke, and he snatched her to him with a choking sob. "Pray for me, too, Genofa, sweet one! Pray that God will accept my offering, and forgive —Heavens, what do I say? Farewell, Genofa, farewell!"

He tore himself away, and before the girl's parched lips had had strength to speak, he was gone.

BOOK VII.

The Kloärch.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK VII.—THE KLOAREK.

CHAPTER I.

"DOWN WITH THE BLUES!"

"Laïques et prêtres, il faut prendre votre parti. Voyez à mourir et à combattre. Votre Roi sur la terre, votre Dieu au ciel . . . . tous deux ont été outragés!—qui les vengera?"

"*La Revolution.*"

A COLD November wind was blowing through the narrow streets of the little town of Auray, bringing with it the damp odours of decaying leaves from the wooded banks of the river, and driving a rustling cloud of the leaves themselves into the little square where stands the Hôtel de Ville with the other chief buildings of the place.

Thither also were converging, on this same morning in November, 1792, streams of young men and country lads in the various costumes of the surrounding parishes, most of them carrying their *pen-bas*, and the greater part wearing an expression, half-excited, half-obstinate.

Mothers, sisters, and sweethearts, in many cases

accompanied them; some chattering volubly; some half choked with anxious tears; for this gathering was for the purpose of enrolling the names of the young men of the neighbourhood who might be required to form part of the national guard then being organized all over France, and to invite others to volunteer for the army.

"*La patrie est en danger!*" was the rallying cry throughout France, when, having deposed and imprisoned her King and declared herself a Republic, she saw herself without organized defence and threatened by foreign enemies. But here in the west, that cry was not so heartily repeated as it was elsewhere.

No; for the true-hearted provinces of Brittany and Maine, and the district of La Vendée, could not so easily tear up the old traditions of faith and loyalty which they had held so long; and the exile of their priests still rankled.

Yet the country lads had obeyed the order of their local directory which had summoned them to attend at Auray that morning. They had come; but it was with smothered grumbling, with angry, excited looks, or sullen brows. They had come, because they dared not stay away; but the most part had set out quite uncertain as to how they would act when they got there.

All gathered together in the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville, as the clock struck twelve; and, as the last stroke hummed on the wind-swept air, a man in a

red night-cap came out on the steps, and harangued the people in an eloquent speech full of national vanity,—the grandeur of France, the glorious Republic—"one and indivisible;" universal liberty, brotherhood, and equality; the fatherland in danger, and the wickedness of all those from whom the peril proceeded.

"Forward!" he finished by saying;—"forward, brave sons of the west! Enrol your names on the glorious list of those who are privileged to dip their hands in the blood of the enemies of regenerate France! Wait not for conscription;—conscription did I say? Conscription is for times when the blood is cold; *now* it is all on fire; now every true-born son of France rushes forward to volunteer for her defence, and I dare to say that the voluntary contingent demanded from this commune will be furnished three times over before to-day's sun has set. Forward! Who will volunteer for the army? Who, being hindered from foreign service by the ties of home, will defend our beloved country in her *gardes nationaux?* Come, let me tell in Paris how forward in the cause I found the brave lads of Amorica."

He ceased, and the crowd swayed and hummed in response. That some impression had been made was evident. Some of the young men seemed flattered by the speaker's words, and half inclined to come forward on the spur of the moment and enrol their names; others in the background exhibited their zeal at second-hand by

pushing forward those in front of them. But, no sooner were the steps reached, than there was a stand; no one seemed willing to be the first to mount them and enter the building. The *maire* came out; several officers came out; more speeches were made; then, as the young men still hung back, the authorities on the steps whispered together, and tables with pens, ink, and attendant notaries were brought out into the open air. This seemed to re-assure the crowd a little. There was another impulse forward, though again it was barren of results. Whereupon the red night-capped individual, becoming excited, jumped upon one of the tables and made another speech, more eloquent, but much less flattering than the first; for, instead of sugar and honey, it was seasoned with pepper, mustard, and vinegar; that is, finding flattery fail, he tried sarcasm, reproach, and irony.

"Should he call them cowards? No; Bretons were never cowards, so he was told; yet it looked like it. Could it be that Brittany was against liberty, equality, and fraternity? Was she still under the dominion of a worn-out creed——" Here the maire glanced nervously at the crowd, and made a warning sign to the speaker; but it was lost on him, and he continued—"Still in the chains of slavery, the darkness of superstition; priest-ridden——"

A clod of mud, aimed by a dextrous hand, came full in the speaker's mouth, and ignominiously choked his words.

A woman's voice called out—"That's right, lads; down with the blasphemer!"

There was a moment's pause; then the red-capped man burst out again with a face as scarlet as his head gear—

"Brothers of Brittany! I *will* not believe that you are all like that. One or two fools, perhaps, like the fellow who threw the clod and the woman who spoke just now: children and old wives, I say, may cling to the toys of religion and aristocracy—crosses, images, candles, feathers, and flowers. Such toys are well enough for babes and dotards; but wise men will not bow down to a——"

A howl from the crowd drowned his voice. The maire, who had been anxiously trying to gain his attention, pulled him from the table and took his place, striving to repair the mischief. But it was too late; the most sacred feelings of the crowd had been outraged by the Paris Atheist, and the people would listen no longer. The same woman who had spoken before, screamed again—"Down with the blasphemer!"

The crowd surged forward; but the maire made a sign to a body of gendarmes who were drawn up in front of the hall, and they pushed their way in among the people to remove the excited woman. She struggled, but to no purpose; for the sight of the fire-arms, which her captors carried, appalled the rabble, and they drew back.

"Are you Christians?" she screamed; "will you see me carried away by the heathen?"

At this appeal, a young man elbowed his way towards her from the outskirts of the crowd.

"Shame on us!" he exclaimed. "Shame on us! to let a woman's voice be the only one raised in the cause of our holy religion, and then see her taken without raising a finger! Come on, lads, to the rescue!"

Inspired by his words, several other young men backed him up. The gendarmes, seeing their determination, and receiving no further orders from their *chef*, wavered, loosed their hold on the woman, and fell back. The young rescuer, excited by success, called to his companions—

"What do we Christians here? We are not obliged to fight for any but the King. No volunteers and gardes nationaux, say I, without proper authority! Why should we shed our blood for a Government which will pull down our faith? Why not stand up for our rights, like Jean Chouan, like Cathelineau?"

"Ay, why not?" answered the crowd; "we are enough to resist. Down with the conscription! Down with the gendarmes!"

"And no volunteers—no gardes nationaux?" asked the young man who had taken the lead.

"No volunteers! No gardes nationaux!" howled the crowd. "Down with the Blues!"*

* oldiers of the Republic.

"Well, then, forward!"

"Up with your pen-bas!"

With a storm of *huées*, which utterly drowned the renewed attempt of the poor maire to gain an audience, the young men rushed forward, put to ignominious flight the body of gendarmes, beat with their staffs any who resisted them, obliged the maire and his supporters to retreat and bar themselves into the hotel de ville, overthrew the tables, tore up the lists, and broke the ink-bottles. Then they drew back, and waited for further commands from their young leader. With quick decision he leapt up some steps, folded his arms, and faced the crowd. He was dressed in countryman's blue blouse, and wore a pair of wooden sabots; but there was something about him which distinguished him from the ordinary peasant. His dark, well-cut features showed a certain refinement, a certain thought, a certain mysterious distinction, which the bystanders could not account for; till, a gust of wind striking him in his exalted position, blew off his hat, and then they saw that his head was partially shorn with the preliminary tonsure of the kloärek.

"Why, 'tis Christophe of the Menhir," remarked some Carnac lads among the crowd. And Christophe it was.

"Lads," he said, speaking with considerable excitement—"perhaps you did not mean to go so far when you

came here—*I* did not; nay, I did not even come to answer to my name, but was simply passing by. However, it seems to me we could not, as Christians, have done otherwise. Wisdom, I speak not of. Our elders may tell us we have done imprudently; but it is too late to think of that. And now, what are we to do? Submit and ask pardon?"

Loud cries of "No! no!"

"Go forward, resist, defend our faith, and join the *Chouans?*"*

"Ay, ay! and thou shalt lead us, Christophe?"

"That I cannot do," returned the lad—"'tis not my place as a kloärek, as one ignorant of fighting. There is my foster-brother, now, the Count de Kerdec'h, a soldier, a gentleman——"

"Yes, yes, Monsieur Aymon de Kerdec'h! We know him, he is one of us—we will have him!" shouted the Carnac men, and the others followed suit; for the young Count was popular in the district.

"Well, I will be the ambassador; I will tell him," went on Christophe. "And now we must break up and go quietly home, to deceive the Blues. A meeting-place will be appointed. Long live the King! God save our holy religion, and keep us all! Amen."

It was a solemn ending, and the earnest nature of the Bretons made them take it gravely. Every hat was

* Name given to the followers of Jean Cottereau (nicknamed Jean Chouan—that is, *chat-huant*, or screech-owl), who raised the loyal standard in Maine and Brittany.

doffed, every head was bent, and the deep "*Amen*" which echoed through the crowd was like that at the end of a prayer in church. Then all went quietly home, and the maire, looking timidly out, about half-an-hour later, was re-assured by seeing the square utterly deserted.

CHAPTER II.

"WHO IS IT?"

"He seemed to sift me with his painful eyes."
E. B. BROWNING—"*Aurora Leigh.*"

CHRISTOPHE also left the town but not with the others. He also turned his steps in the direction of Carnac, like the rest of the young men belonging to that place; but he took care to leave Auray by a different road, and to get the start of his fellow-parishioners.

He walked along thoughtfully. Now that he had had time to cool, he began to have some misgivings about the step he had taken.

In the excitement of the moment, he had, perhaps, been hurried along too far; and yet, could he have helped it? Having done it, would the young seigneur back him up? If Count Aymon refused to come forward as leader, what would be the result? He thought of all those young men, kindled to enthusiasm against oppression and wrong. The train, indeed, had been already laid; but he it was who had put the match to it: what if it should explode in a way he had not bargained for? These thoughts troubled the young kloärek, as he walked along with his eyes on the

ground; nor were these the only troublous thoughts in his mind Presently. he drew a letter from his pocket and began to study it with a frown on his brow. He had advanced much in learning during his studies of the last months; but writing still presented some difficulties to him. This paper, however, he was not reading for the first time. It had come to him through Bernèz (with whom he had been in hiding some days, since the little knot of master and students in the island where he had lived during the autumn, had been discovered and broken up), and it was signed "Yvonne."

The words contained in it were few, only these:—"*Danger threatens your adopted kinsfolk here. You should be at hand in case of need. Beware of the stranger!*"

"The stranger!" that must mean Barber Postik; Yvonne never much trusted him. What was the danger, and which of his adopted kinsfolk did it threaten? Christophe asked himself this question anxiously; for already ghastly stories were being whispered of the doings in Paris and the other centres of agitation in France. If a King's person were not sacred, who would be respected? Who was safe?

Thinking such thoughts as these, Christophe crossed the landes; too much absorbed in anxious considerations concerning the future to do more than shudder slightly, as his eyes fell on the grim menhirs, which time had not touched nor weather changed since he saw them last.

Besides, his conscience was at rest now, and they could not trouble him as they had once done. Irksome as his present life was to him in many ways, he felt it as an atonement, as a penance, no longer shrunk from; and he was more at peace than he had been since the fatal night by Saint-Samson.

The event of the morning had acted as a moral tonic to him; for he had been greatly dreading the return to Carnac, the meeting with Genofa, and the sight of his foster-brother; trembling for his resolution against the one—not knowing how he should face the other, with the knowledge of the dreadful secret within him.

Now, the thought of insurrection was uppermost; and, kloärek as he was, the idea of resistance made his heart beat with excitement. The image of Aymon as a leader, swallowed up for the time his character as a son whose father had met death from his.

Yet, spite of this, Christophe felt the blood ebb from his face, as he reached the door of the Château of Coëtmor, and asked for Count Aymon.

The servant was a Carnac man, an old friend, and went at once to carry his request.

"He is not in at present," he said, coming back; "but Madame is expecting him. Will you come in and wait? Here," he continued, throwing open a door to the left of the entrance-hall,—"sit down, and I will tell M. le

Comte the moment he comes in. We do not know where he is, or you might go to him."

Christophe thanked the servant, who retired, closing the door behind him.

It was a sort of inner vestibule in which the young kloärek found himself. A stone-mullioned, stained window filled almost the whole of one side; on the other hung family pictures, and there was a door at either end.

Christophe waited half-an-hour—an hour. The sun sank lower, and streamed obliquely through the coloured glass. The lad's heart beat with impatience. The Carnac men must be returning, and the seigneur was still unaware of what had taken place. He was just thinking of leaving and going in search of Count Aymon, when a step was heard in the room beyond, and a hand was laid on the handle of the door opposite to that by which he had entered.

Christophe started up, expecting to see the Count appear; but no; the door opened, and a gentleman entered whom he had never seen before, and walked slowly up the corridor. Perhaps the slanting sunlight which streamed crimson through the panes, was in his eyes, for he did not seem to see Christophe. He came on with measured step, his tall form stooping forward, his chin sunk upon his breast. The hair of his head was snowy white, and yet he did not look old, and his complexion was delicate as a woman's.

Christophe bent low. He guessed who it must be—the Chevalier de Kerdec'h, whom all the villagers had heard of, but few had seen. "He was such a sad invalid," as the Château people said; "moonstruck," whispered the peasants. When the Chevalier was within three paces of Christophe, he saw him at last, as he stood, cap in hand, with the sunbeams shining like an aureole round his half-tonsured head.

"Ah!" he said, stopping suddenly, and gazing earnestly at the lad—"ah, *mon Dieu*, who is it?"

A strange, wistful, puzzled look came into his pale blue eyes. "Who is it?" he repeated, with the gaze of one who is walking in a dream, and has been suddenly startled.

"I am Christophe, Monsieur," answered the lad.

"Christophe—*what?*" repeated the Chevalier; "you have another name?"

The sensitive colour rushed to the face of the young kloärek.

"No, Monsieur." Then, as he saw the questioning look still in the Chevalier's eyes, he added, hastily, "I am Monsieur le Comte's foster-brother!"

"Ah! I thought, I thought—but no matter. What do you want here, boy? Why do you come? *I* was not to blame.

Christophe was surprised; but he recollected what was reported of the Chevalier, and answered as quietly as possible—

"Nor does any one think of blaming Monsieur. I came on business with the seigneur; but they tell me he is out. Does Monsieur, perhaps, know——"

He was cut short by the hasty entrance of a valet.

"Ah! Monsieur is *here*, then!" he exclaimed, going up to the Chevalier. "I missed him from his room when I returned, and was anxious."

He cast a quick look of inquiry at Christophe, and moderated his anxious tone:—

"Monsieur's medicine is ready. Will he kindly come and take it? It is the hour."

He waited for an answer. But his master paid no attention; he was gazing fixedly at Christophe.

"What did you say?" he asked, presently, addressing, not the expectant valet, but the young kloärek.

Christophe felt strangely embarrassed by the fixed gaze of the gentleman.

"I asked if, perhaps, Monsieur knew where I might find the seigneur," he said, with an effort to recall his own question.

There was something in the mild face turned to his which irresistibly attracted and interested him. Each pair of eyes seemed drawn to the other, and yet each gazer was ill at ease.

"Monsieur le Comte went down to Antonn Comorre's farm more than an hour ago," said the valet, presently, seeing that his master did not reply. "Monsieur le

Chevalier and I were walking on the north terrace, and I saw him go; you will probably find him there. You had better go now, young man," added the servant, in a lower voice; "you are disturbing my master."

Christophe bowed low, and was about to withdraw, but was detained by the Chevalier.

"You will come again?" he said, wistfully. "I shall see you again?"

"If Monsieur please," replied the young kloärek, surprised. "I am at Monsieur's commands; he has only to send for me."

He bowed again, left the room, and took his way to his foster-father's farm, wondering over his interview with the mysterious and unfortunate member of the De Kerdec'h family.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE BRINK OF AN ABYSS.

"I am as one who on the brink
Of a dark river stands."
LONGFELLOW—"*The Golden Legend.*"

THE breeze of the morning had sunk, the sun had already set in a dull red haze, and scarcely a twig was stirring, as Christophe pushed open the garden-gate (he noticed that it was not latched) and walked up the well-remembered path to the back door.

When he was about midway, he heard low-pitched voices to his left, and, thinking to find some of the family there, he turned up a little side path which led to the dairy.

The door was partly open, and through it he descried what, even in the waning light, he at once recognised as the figures of the young Count and of his foster-sister Genofa. She was standing with her face in profile against the gloom behind, dressed in her working clothes, with the sleeves pushed up above her dimpled elbows, as though she had been interrupted in her occupation of straining the milk. He was standing facing her, an earnest light in his handsome eyes, an earnest tone in the

voice which said:—"Then thou, at least, wilt stand by us —by *me*, Genofa? Thou, at least, wilt be true, whoever else fails?"

Christophe stood as if rooted to the spot; the blood sang in his ears; something within him seemed to rise up and to impel him, with passion well nigh uncontrollable, to gather all his strength together and spring at his foster-brother's throat. Yet he restrained himself by a desperate effort, and, with a wariness which was scarcely conscious, drew himself behind a lilac bush-which encroached on the path. Were they really the pair he took them for? *Could* they be such traitors? Was not the twilight, and, perhaps, his own excitement deceiving him?

He set his teeth, and forced himself to await further proof.

No; he was not deceived. It was Genofa's voice and none other, which replied to the appeal:—"Can you doubt? *Could* we deceive you?"—and it was just as surely the young seigneur's impetuous gesture which raised her hand to his lips while, he exclaimed fervently—"I knew it! We will stand or fall together, Genofa."

Christophe heard no more. To stay longer would be to give way utterly to the devil that was in him. His hand had been uplifted, his body drawn together in the very act to spring, when something—a sudden look or motion on the part of the young Count, an effect of light and shade,—what it was he could never tell,—had recalled,

in a sudden flash, the memory of that lad's father by the menhir of Saint-Samson! It was as though God had touched him and pointed to the abyss into which he was ready to fall. A feeling of utter helplessness came over the lad, and with a quick motion he crossed himself and crept away.

Away—away—where he knew not, with stumbling feet and sickening heart. The experience of those last five minutes had been almost more than brain could bear. Heart and soul had alike received a terrible blow—blows which were a revelation.

The young kloärek had hoped that the passion for Genofa—that passion which he had done bitter penance for, as having turned him from the narrow way of duty—had been purified from his heart by the fire of self-denial and humiliation. He had hoped that he would be able to look on her only as a sister—as a sister whom he had been withheld from hurting by union with one who bore such a doom as he did. Yet that first glance showed him that he had failed to root the passion from his breast—he knew it by the pang it gave him even to contemplate her turning to another. And that other was his foster-brother! There also his heart was pierced, and doubly pierced; for he had once loved his young seigneur with a brother's love, and had believed that it was returned by one worthy. Yet Aymon had known of his betrothal to Genofa; he had heard the sad story of their parting,

doubtless—had not all the village spoken of it?—and, knowing this, he could come and defile the purity which the other brother had sacrificed himself to spare. Yes, defile—that was the word. If that purity could be dimmed by lawful union with one who was the innocent sufferer from, the unwilling partaker in the crime of another; how would it not be polluted by being made deliberately the plaything of an idle hour? Christophe never dreamed that the young Count could have another purpose; he knew too well the great gulf which divided classes asunder at that time in France, when to wed one of the lower orders was looked on, in the upper, as a disgrace greater than crime itself.

The lad ground his teeth as he thought of this, and then let his head sink upon his breast in utter self-abasement at the feeling of his own wickedness If Aymon were guilty, what was *he* that he should judge him? Had he not been ready to do murder, to dip his hand in a brother's blood—he, a kloärek, an aspirant to the priesthood? Alas! he felt as though that crime, ignorantly shared in so long ago, had eaten its black canker into his very soul, and corrupted him through and through. His new-found peace and hope in a higher life seemed utterly shattered—the horrible belief in a pitiless and inexorable fate had returned.

"Being that man's son, how can I be otherwise?"

groaned the lad in his misery. "A murderer's son—or the Child of a Menhir!—what does it matter what I do?"

His first impulse was to quit the country altogether, to leave things to their fate, if by so doing he might at least have some hope of saving his own soul; but the thought of what he had undertaken in the morning made him pause. All those brave lads, his old companions, who trusted in him—could he desert them, break his word to them? Would it, indeed, be saving his own soul to play the traitor to them? If the revolutionary committees were to get scent of their purpose before they were organized, with a leader at their head, what was to become of the poor lads? He thought of some of the stories he had heard, and shuddered. There were those among the revolutionary leaders who would stick at nothing; and had he not been already warned against Barber Postik?

At least he must do his errand; he must see the young seigneur, bitter as it might be. Till that was accomplished, he must restrain himself, and then—— Well, afterwards he did not care much what became of him.

CHAPTER IV.

BENEATH THE CRUCIFIX.

"Gramercy, gentle brother, what evil have I done?"

"We come for right; to know, in brief,
Hath Heaven a God—Bretagne a chief?
"*Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*"

At this juncture Christophe's thoughts were interrupted by a cheer coming from the direction of the village.

"It is our lads returning," he thought to himself, and paused.

He had reached a "*carrefour*," or place where four ways meet, on the direct road between Antonn's farm and the Château Coëtmor. It was the same which had been the scene of his terrible struggle on the evening of the Pardon at Sainte-Anne d'Auray. There was the great Crucifix, at whose feet he had knelt and submitted to his fate; there the stone on which his tears of agony had fallen; there the very spot which his knees had touched when he had called upon God to accept an atonement and cease to visit upon him his father's sin.

What place so suitable for the task he had to perform? Here, at least, he might hope for self-conquest by the

memory of what he was, by the power of the Christ whose image was nailed up there.

The young seigneur would, in all probability, pass that way on his return home. It was now moon-rise, and he could not miss him; he would wait.

Thus resolving, Christophe knelt down beside the Crucifix, and prayed for strength; prayed that he might remember what had been done, by him and his, to the father of this young man. He had not knelt many minutes, when a step was heard on the road leading from Antonn Comorre's farm, and a voice whistling softly a little Bretagne *sône*.

Christophe rose as the sounds came nearer, and in another minute found himself face to face with his foster-brother.

"Christophe, lad, *thou* here!" exclaimed Aymon de Kerdec'h, stopping short with surprise. "Why, Genofa told me——"

The young kloärek winced at the name, and interrupted him hastily.

"Yes, yes; but I am back on business. Monsieur le Comte, I am the bearer of a message to you from the young men of Carnac and of most of the other parishes round Auray. They refused to enrol themselves, this morning, under the Republic. They wish to join the *Chouans*, and strike a blow for the faith, if you will be their leader."

"Ah, what is that? Tell me all about it!" exclaimed Count Aymon, eagerly.

Christophe did so, speaking in a cold business-like tone, which sounded unnatural, even to himself.

"Strange," murmured the young Count, as he ceased—"strange; that fellow told me the peasants were disaffected towards us—warned me that even—well, well, let that pass. You are *sure* of what you say, Christophe?"

The young kloärek's blood tingled at the doubt which seemed implied. It was with difficulty he mastered himself sufficiently to reply.

"Monsieur has only to ask"

"Nay, don't be angry, Christophe," went on the other, seeing that he had given offence. "It is only that I was given to understand the contrary. If it had not been for that, I don't think I could have kept quiet all this time. I have been advised to keep quiet; to give no cause of offence, for my mother and sister's sake, and for that of my poor uncle. I think it would kill him to go into exile, and my mother is such an invalid since her widowhood." He paused a moment, and Christophe's heart beat fast at the last allusion.

"But," continued the young Count, rousing himself, and speaking with an eagerness which he could not conceal, "if the lads have really resolved to rise—if they really want me for their leader in the good cause—why'

then—oh! to strike a blow at those Blues! to join with those who have already raised the white flag! It would be glorious!"

The young man's eyes sparkled; he looked for sympathy from his foster-brother; but Christophe's face looked as hard as a stone.

"What is the matter?" asked the Count, presently. "We have not met for a long time, Christophe; but you seem quite changed. Can it be the gloom of the coming priesthood, old boy? No? Well, what is it?"

"Monsieur knows well enough," burst out the young kloärek; then pulled himself up with an effort.

"Monsieur! Hey-day, since when are we on those terms? Can I have offended the lad?" he went on in an aside to himself. "Let me see, we have not met since—ah, I have it!—the night he caught me in the garden with pretty Genofa! But Christophe!" (he turned again to his foster-brother with a smile) "Surely thou hast forgiven me those hasty words in the garden, last summer? Surely thou art not jealous *now*, old boy? Why, they tell me thou hast quite given up thy pretty sweetheart for the charms of the tonsure! I can't say much for thy taste, for our little foster-sister is pretty enough to tempt Saint Anthony himself; but——" He stopped in surprise at the terrible look which showed itself on his foster-brother's face. For a moment he seemed about to do something desperate; then his eyes

turned to the Crucifix; he bit his lips, clenched his hands till the nails dented the flesh, held his breath for a moment, then answered with desperate calm:—

"It is not jealousy."

"What, then?"

Surprise took from the young aristocrat the power of saying anything more.

Christophe looked at him for a moment, and then burst out in a voice of passionate pleading:—

"I *cannot* see her ruined! I cannot stand by without a word and see her purity sullied—see the little trusting thing deceived with fine speeches, till she forget all, and —oh, Monsieur Aymon, I *did* think once that you would grow up a worthy man—don't do this; don't, don't!"

A sob choked him and he covered his face.

A variety of expressions chased each other over the face of the gay young aristocrat—extreme surprise, anger, consternation—then a look of genuine emotion. Thoughtless he might be, but he was not heartless.

"Christophe," he said, presently, 'you are deceiving yourself. Do you think I forget who Genofa is? I would not harm her for the world."

"Do you mean to marry her, then?"

"I? Marry her? No—and yet I could not have a prettier or a sweeter wife!" The last words were added with a half regretful sigh.

"Then it is base in you to trifle with her as you are

doing—to ask from her promises as you do, as though you cared for having them. If worse do not come of it, at least her heart may be broken—broken to give you a moment's pleasure!

The young Count turned scarlet. He laid his hand impetuously on the short rapier which he wore, then withdrew it with a scornful laugh.

"It seems to me you presume too soon upon your profession, sir," he answered, haughtily, "a nice to-do, indeed about what, when all's said and done, never went beyond the little scene in the garden you unfortunately witnessed. Why, to speak truth, the little hussy tired of the game, which, I believe, so far as her part in it went, was played with a purpose. *You're* the one who has committed the crime of breaking her heart, I fancy, if anyone's guilty!"

Christophe winced, then looked up half-relieved; but the words he had overheard returned to his memory, and he answered, coldly—

"And yet you made her promise to be true to you this very evening."

The young Count burst out with an angry exclamation—

"And pray how do *you* know?—Eaves-dropping?"

"I was *not* eaves-dropping," returned Christophe, with haughtiness, to match his own. "I came up to the farm to give you that message, and heard a few words of what you were saying to her in the dairy."

To his surprise, Aymon de Kerdec'h interrupted him with a merry laugh—

"Upon my word, Christophe, you are the most jealous fellow that ever mistook his vocation and embraced celibacy for matrimony! Did ever anyone hear of a more absurd misconception? Why, that was a *business* interview, not a love-tryst—she was promising to be true to me as her liege-lord, not as her lover! There—don't look so grimly mystified—this is how it was. I had been b~~een~~ warned—never mind by whom—that the village was being turned against me; that even the Comorre's were no longer true; that there was a plot for betraying me—see, I am trusting you, Christophe; I should hardly do that if I were the villain you take me for. Well, I went down to speak to Antonn (I didn't believe the calumny, o course); but he was gone with his wife to Auray, and Genofa had to answer for them. There, Christophe, are you satisfied?"

"Then you give me your word?"

"Suspicious still?" The young seigneur smiled frankly, and held out his hand. "There, Christophe; my hand on it. I have not been the pupil of Dom Clemençz *quite* for nothing, bad as you think me."

The young kloärek was completely won. The foster-brothers clasped hands, the soft palm of the aristocrat pressing the hard palm of the child of the people. If class could meet class oftener like that, we should see

fewer revolutions. So absorbed had the foster-brothers been in the business between them, that they had not noticed the tramp of many feet coming up the lane from the direction of the village; but no sooner had they joined hands in token of renewed confidence and friendship, than a score of young men entered the *carrefour* and, on perceiving the two, burst into a cheer.

"Long live Count Aymon de Kerdec'h and Christophe of the Menhir! Down with the blues!"

"Hullo, lads," exclaimed the young Seigneur, recovering from his first start of surprise; "what is the matter?"

"The matter!" called out a dozen voices. "Hasn't Christophe told you? We want you to lead us against the Blues."

"Gently, my lads," answered Aymon, as the villager came pressing around him, talking excitedly in Breton, and evidently carried away at last by the spirit of revolt which had long been smouldering within them. But though prudence bid him say, "gently," his sparkling eyes, and the smile which curled about his mouth, showed that he was as joyously excited as any of them at the thought of at last throwing off the enforced submission to a hated authority, and striking a blow for that liberty, which the Republicans prized so much for themselves, but would not accord to those who differed from them.

The village lads, however, were in no mood to be

repressed, even by the popular Seigneur. They crowded around him, they entreated, they urged; and when, at last, the boy—he was scarcely more—was so far carried away by the common enthusiasm as to make them a sort of conditional promise, their excitement knew no bounds.

It was a strange scene, under the cold November moon, to see those sturdy, long-locked fellows encircling the two foster-brothers, coupling their names in ringing cheers, throwing up their beavers into the air as they huzzahed; while upon them looked down the wooden figure of the Christ, with sorrowful face and outstretched arms, throwing the awful shadow of the Cross upon the young and thoughtless group.

"Thoughtless" is, however, scarcely the word; the earnest Breton people are rarely that; and even those young men, when the first burst of excitement was over, remembered the gravity of what they were undertaking, and with one consent knelt beneath the Crucifix, while the young kloärek asked for a blessing on their enterprise. So closely is religion bound up with every act of the children of Amorica.

CHAPTER V.

DENOUNCED.

"There he stands!
* * * *
. . The scene shifts—faugh! what hangman's hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? his own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!"
R. BROWNING—"*Childe Roland.*"

WHEN they rose from their knees, each of the conspirators gave an involuntary start on perceiving that, in the meantime, another individual had joined their company. He was standing in the midst of the carrefour, evidently waiting for them to rise. The moonlight shone full on his short, thick-set figure and grizzled hair, so that the Carnac lads had no difficulty in recognising him as Barber Postik.

"Monsieur," he said, turning to the Count, and then with a wave of his hand including the peasants—"Monsieur, and good people, my neighbours, I was passing this way, and have seen and heard a part of what, perhaps, I was not meant either to see or to hear. That I am worthy of your confidence I think I have proved by this time: but let that pass. Only let us thank Heaven that I *have* seen and heard; for I am permitted to be the means

of warning you from the brink of an abyss—a great black abyss of foul treason."

"Treason!" exclaimed the Count, and every voice there echoed the vile word—"treason! what treason?—who is the traitor?"

"Will Monsieur le Comte and my good neighbours permit me to ask a question? Am I right in what I believe I heard—namely, that it was he whom you call Christophe of the Menhir who began the rising at Auray this morning?—that it was he who proposed Monsieur as the leader, and who carried the message?"

Young Aymon de Kerdec'h looked doubtfully at the barber, and hesitated to answer; but his men were less prudent.

"Yes, yes!" shouted they all, with one accord; "to be sure it was Christophe. But what, then?"

"What, then? Why, just this—'tis *he* who is the traitor: he proposes to earn a reward from the Government by first compromising Monsieur le Comte and his people, and then betraying them. That is his little game, but I trust I am in time to stop it, good neighbours."

"Never! Christophe, answer him! Thrust the lie down his throat, lad!" shouted both Seigneur and peasants with one voice.

The young kloärek, scarcely knowing whether he were more astonished or angry at this unlooked-for accusation, stepped forward immediately and confronted the speaker.

"Why do you say this?" he asked, vehemently. "You *know* it is false!"

"Bravo, Christophe! we knew it!" shouted his companions. "Come, lads, up with your *pen bas;* let us punish the liar!"

The barber shrank back, but quickly recovering himself, he came up close to Aymon, and said, impressively—"Will Monsieur allow me to give a proof of this fellow's untrustworthiness? Monsieur does not know how much depends on his having a moment's patience."

The Carnac lads had closed around; every one who carried his quarter-staff clenched it tightly and clamoured loudly for their victim to be delivered to them without more words. But Aymon had been impressed by his manner.

"Let us just hear what more he has to say for himself, lads," he said. "It can do no harm; and should it be more lies, you can give him double punishment."

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed the men, with a grim laugh. And they listened.

"Now, fellow," said the Count, "and mind your words are few, for should you lie, you shall have a blow for each."

"Monsieur is pleased to be witty," answered the barber, with ill-suppressed bitterness; "but, nevertheless, he shall be obeyed. What I have to say requires few words. Monsieur's father was murdered. His murderer has

hitherto escaped. There he stands!" He pointed to Christophe, who was standing out from among his fellows, and then closed with a triumphant accent:—"*Now*, you will judge whether or not he is a fellow to be trusted!"

The young Count started, turned a pair of wide-open eyes on the young kloärek, and was silent for a moment from sheer astonishment. The villagers followed their Seigneur's example. Every eye was silently fixed on the lad, who stood alone, like a prisoner arraigned at the bar.

He had been listening for the barber's next words in contemptuous confidence, sure of being able to cast them back in his teeth. But the words which really came were as unexpected as they were terrible, and their effect on the young man was evident to all. Even in the moonlight they could see the look of awful horror which came over his countenance, changing every feature as at the sudden aspect of a ghastly thing. The eyes distended, the lips drew back from the teeth, the head drooped, as though it could not hold itself upright any longer to look them in the face.

Christophe felt that the hour he had so long dreaded had come at last, and it was even more terrible than fancy had ever pictured it. The blood surged up into his head, and sang so in his ears, that he did not at first hear that he was being spoken to.

"Christophe!" his foster-brother was saying, in tones sharp with pain. "Christophe, do you not hear? Speak to us; tell us it is another lie."

But Christophe answered not a word. Only he raised his head a moment, shot at his foster-brother a look of piteous appeal, like that of some wild animal taken in the toils, for whom the dogs are waiting till his captor shall let him loose, and let his head sink again upon his breast.

"Christophe, speak!" said the village lads, appalled at the silence of their champion. They had so confidently trusted that he would clear himself from the stranger's accusations—they felt that the honour of the village was at stake, and they could not bear that a Carnac lad should go down before the weapon—tongue or pen-bas, it was all one—of an outsider. For Christophe *was* a Carnac lad, now. Whatever his origin, they had admitted him as one of themselves by baptism and confirmation, by many a religious rite and social privilege shared together, and if he would but have spoken, his word—for the moment at least—would have stood against that of the stranger.

But Christophe would not speak—he could not; no, not though his foster-brother, his former playfellows and companions wrung his heart with their appeals! For the first moment the accusation had so stunned him that he had not the power to deny it. Afterwards, when the hot words of denial were ready to rush from his lips, he

pressed them back, for the thought of his father kept him silent. He hated the man as an oppressor; abhorred him as one stained with crimes of foulest die; loathed him doubly for the relation in which they stood to each other; yet, with all this, he was his father, and he could not clear himself without accusing the other. He knew what the accusation would draw upon him, and he could not bring himself to make it. The word *parricide* seemed to be shrieked in his ears when he opened his lips to speak, and he shut them again in horror. Added to this there was the morbid idea which that terrible sight had so impressed on the lad's young mind—that he was implicated in the deed, innocently, he knew, but yet the fact remained. If the father had struck the blow, the son had lured the victim to his death.

"You see," said Barber Postik, at length, "he cannot deny his guilt. Will Monsieur give orders to secure him before he does further harm?"

The young Count started.

"Traitor, indeed," he said, in a tone of conviction. Yes, secure him, lads!"

But Christophe did not wait for the utterly petrified young fellows to recover themselves sufficiently for action. With a sudden bound he darted from his place, leaped a fence, and was off like a deer across the fields. He heard the others give chase; but in the dim light, the many hedges, cross-lanes, and clumps of trees allowed him to

avoid them, and, doubling upon his tracks, he soon heard their voices in quite an opposite direction; he, running towards the village, they away from it. He intended to double again when the next cross-lane should give him fit opportunity—at least, such was the dim instinct which was all his stunned condition allowed him to be conscious of—when, in darting round a turn, he ran right up against a figure coming from the opposite direction.

The lane was dim with overarching trees, so that the two, who had been thus suddenly brought up face to face by the force of the collision, could not distinctly see each other. Yet each had uttered an exclamation as they met, and Christophe's voice had betrayed him.

"Holy Virgin! it is thou, Christophe?"

The voice was Yvonne's, and a sudden impulse impelled the young kloärek to lay his hand upon her arm, and say brokenly—

"Save me, Yvonne!—for God's sake, hide me somewhere!"

"Save thee, Christophe?" she asked in astonishment.

"Yes—ah! for Heaven's sake, hide me!—they are coming—they will kill me!" exclaimed the lad, in a voice so changed by terror, that she scarcely knew it, and he laid the other hand upon her arm and clung to her like a child.

She did not ask any more; she saw that something very terrible had happened; she felt that he trusted her,

and, even at that moment of horrible uncertainty, the girl's heart glowed within her at the thought. Drawing his arm within hers, she turned and walked swiftly back towards the village, which was close at hand. Swiftly and silently she re-entered the cottage, opened the door which led to the hay-loft, motioned the lad to precede her up the ladder, and saw him stagger across the floor and sink down exhausted upon the hay. Very quietly she followed him, and, kneeling down, bent over him her pure and pitying face.

"Christophe, my friend," she said, softly, "thou art safe for the present, at least; no one will think of looking for thee here. Do not be afraid, my friend; I will watch, and warn thee of any danger. Do not fear. May God and the good angels keep thee!"

And the poor fugitive, looking into that sweet, compassionate face, felt as though the Virgin Mother had descended from her niche and were bending down to promise him peace; and he let that peace steal over his exhausted senses, and slept.

Yvonne watched him a moment, breathed a prayer over the sleeping face, and then stole softly down the ladder again.

Some moments were spent in arranging her grandfather's pillows for the night—he seldom roused now, except to take food—and then, with a sigh, she knelt beneath her great-grandmother's old Crucifix.

"Oh, good God!" prayed the girl, "Holy One, give me strength! help me to save him! Only let me save him—I ask nothing more. Accept, if it please Thee, my life for his, so only Thou keep him safe. Ah, Jesus, help me, for I love him—love him!"

She let her head fall upon the clasped hands which lay on the top of her *prie-dieu*, and hid her burning face at the foot of the Cross. And there she watched all night.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MIST.

"One friend in that path shall be,
To secure my step from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."
R. BROWNING—"*A Serenade.*"

"AH, Christophe! ah, poor, poor boy, how thou must have suffered!"

He had told her all—all but the name of the actual murderer, which, indeed, she had little trouble in guessing—told all, as to a father confessor, or to a tender mother; for like a mother's was the girl's manner, as she knelt by him and listened. Such tender pity, such sweet compassion was in the noble face, touched by the morning sunbeams, which slid in dusty rays through the chinks in the walls of the hay-loft. Such strong, earnest trustiness, that the fevered fugitive felt calmed and eased, as he leaned against the trusses of fragrant hay, and poured out what had so long lain festering on his heart.

"Ah, how thou must have suffered!" she went on, in her pitying voice. "But, Christophe, my friend, thou canst not have told to Bernèz *all* that thou hast told to me."

He looked up at her with a question in his eyes.

"No," she continued, "no, else he would not have advised thee as he did."

"Indeed, I told him all. What dost thou mean, Yvonne?"

He asked the question half querulously.

"Nay, do not be vexed," she returned, gently. "But, Christophe, it seems to me that thou hast done wrong in flying to the priesthood, feeling as thou dost for Genofa; and she—ah, she loves thee, Christophe! I know it. She nearly broke her heart at parting—poor little thing!"

The lad's face quivered.

"But, Yvonne, the atonement, the—ah! God knows what it cost me!"

His voice broke.

"Yes, but perhaps God willed it to be wrought out otherwise—*thou* wast not the sinner, poor friend! And does God will us to pay a grudging sacrifice?—one for which, perhaps, he does not even call? Christophe, I may be too presumptuous—Bernèz and I do not think alike about it—but it seems to me that there are other vocations which are holy also, as well as that one. And, oh! Christophe, to be fit for *that* one, should not one be very sure of the true call? Does a man desire an unwilling bride, or a woman an unwilling husband? How, then, shall we give to God and His Church a service, grudged as a hard sacrifice to a severe taskmaster? when it should be

a love, burning for Him alone — counting it almost too great an honour to be chosen for His peculiar ministry."

She had spoken vehemently the convictions of a true heart, whose very singleness and unselfishness made it see through the mist of sophistry which blinds too many, and makes them, from a false notion of God's will, mutilate the very right hand which should have done Him service. She spoke the more earnestly, perhaps, that she knew she was pleading against herself. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes shone, her face, of too massive a mould for beauty at all times, became so transfigured that Christophe felt himself looking at her in genuine admiration.

She saw it, crimsoned to the brow, and turned away. She could not add another word.

"Well, it is too late now," said the young kloärek, presently; and she did not contradict him.

Afternoon came without anyone coming near the fugitive's hiding-place. Yvonne had not left the cottage; and though she could see that there was an unusual stir in the village—groups gathering, men and women speaking, with many a gesticulation—the abode of the Guenedons seemed in no way an object of suspicion.

At length, towards three o'clock, the girl thought she might safely leave her post for a short time to fetch water for the household needs, and see to the cow, which her meeting with Christophe had hindered her from bringing in from the landes the evening before. To tell the truth,

her mind had run much on the old black cow during her night's vigil, and she had thought no shame to mingle with her prayers for Christophe a petition that "Blackthorn," as she called her, might not be stolen by man or beast; for the girl and her grandfather were very poor, and the old man now lived almost entirely on milk.

So Yvonne stole up to the hay-loft, told her refugee that she must go out for half-an-hour, but would lock the door during her absence; looked at her sleeping grandfather, and went out into the raw air of the grey November day.

Autumn leaves, the last survivors of the gay, green dancers of summer, were falling sadly and slowly, as she went along the lane; little hard red haws were all that was left on the hedges of the delicate white which had clothed them when she and Christophe stood by the gate that morning in June, and he had told her the tale of his love for Genofa.

A cold sea-wind, not high and boisterous, but slow, dank, and drear, swept over the landes, bringing with it a dim, grey mist, from out of which the menhirs loomed more spectral than ever.

Yvonne shivered, in spite of herself, and quickened her steps. She had to go some way beyond the first group of Druid stones before she could find Blackthorn; but at length the well-known low answered to her call, and the creature came running to her, thrusting its cold nose

into her hand and rubbing its shaggy head against her side like a faithful dog. The poor creature was in evident discomfort for want of milking; and, loth as the girl was to lose any of the milk, she stopped a moment within shelter of the menhirs to relieve the poor creature of some of it, so that she might go home at a quicker pace. While she was thus occupied, the sound of voices close at hand struck on her ear, and hearing Christophe's name, she listened intently.

The speakers were hidden from her, whether by the ever thickening pall of mist or by the menhirs, she could not discover; but the voices seemed to come from the other side of the tall grey stone under which she stood.

With beating heart, she pressed up nearer to it, crouching down at its foot, and held her breath to hear, while the black cow stood quietly by.

"Now I'll just tell you what, Citizen Klaskervara," a voice said which seemed known to her:—"I must hear this secret now; you've kept playing with me and putting off far too long already: I wont wait longer."

"I told you there were others concerned ——"

"Nonsense! what if there are? Out with it. I ought to have laid information in Auray before now against our young aristocrat up there at Coëtmor. It must be done this afternoon, as you know well, and although this promise to head the rising, which I overheard last night, may be ground sufficient for his arrest, the authorities will prefer

the whole story; and you owe it to me to keep nothing back; you know that, Citizen Klaskervara."

"Halt, there, Citizen Barber," returned the other voice—"You owed it to me to take no steps against my lad without my knowledge. Where'd *you* have been now without my help? And to go and denounce him like that!"

"What could I do?" asked the other, in a more deprecating tone. "He wouldn't keep out of the way, you see, even after all our trouble; and seeing that we were on the eve of a rising against the Government, I was forced to play our trump-card."

"And you say he did not deny his guilt? Never tried to shift it on to another?" asked the second voice, in a tone of ill-concealed anxiety."

"No, why should he? It would have been of no use."

"True, but I scarcely thought he'd have taken it so silently. Well, he seems to have got clear off."

"Apparently—there was no tracking him—but come now, I must be off; out with the secret!"

There was a moment's silence, during which the other seemed to reflect; for when he spoke, it was in the tone of one who has made a sudden resolve:—

"Look you here, Citizen Barber, since the good of our beloved country requires it, I won't keep the matter back, painful as it may be to me. It must be for a consideration though—I'm a poor man. You must see the Citizen

Director in Auray, and tell him I'm ready to make the deposition to the officer he sends over with you this evening."

The other uttered an impatient oath.

"You'd better come with me at once then, and make your deposition, as you call it, in Auray. Tuts, man—tell me now, and trust me for the consideration."

"I can't—the matter requires thinking over before I could tell it straight; and as for going with you to Auray, you forget that you commissioned me to have the roads and principal entrances of the Château watched, in case the aristocrats get wind. You can't do without me, you see, Citizen Barber."

The other swore again under his breath, but submitted.

"Well, at least, you promise to tell all, this evening?"

"Yes—for a consideration. How much will they offer, think you?"

"Will five *louis* do?"

"Not more?" (in a tone of disappointment).

"Scarcely, the country's poor. And see, should not her sons serve her for love?"

A queer, untranslatable sound was the answer; then, after a pause:—

"Well, well, I'll take five. We meet to-night, then, at—— Hark! what was that?"

Yvonne trembled in her hiding place, as she heard a

step move round the menhir; but her position at its foot and the thick mist shielded her.

"Humph, only an old cow browsing," said the voice, which she now knew to be Barber Postik's. Yes; we meet as arranged. Now, see to posting your brethren the klaskervaras. Adieu!"

"*Au diable!*" murmured the other, when his fellow conspirator was far enough to be beyond earshot; and then, with a chuckling laugh, he also moved away into the mist.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE CALCULATION.

Par. "I'll about it this evening; and I will presently pen down my dilemmas, encourage myself in my certainty, put myself into my mortal preparation . . . . I know not what the success will be; but the attempt I vow."

SHAKESPEARE:—"*All's well that ends well.*"

THE power of reading thought is a privilege which we all, at times, would give large sums to possess. To look into the mind of a friend or an enemy, and see there the thoughts and intentions which he is hiding from us under the mask of reserve or hypocrisy, is what many long to do; but such a peep behind the scenes is given but to few in this world of fact. In the world of fiction it is otherwise. The showman there, at least, is behind the curtain, and can raise it when he pleases to give his audience a peep.

We will use this privilege now, and look into the thinking-machine (it can scarcely be called a mind) of Matelinn Gourven, the klaskervara.

He had been obliged to make a very rapid calculation of chances when giving his answer to the barber; he now went over matters rather more at leisure, as he walked across the landes towards Carnac, in the cold grey mist. "Yes," he thought to himself, "I will chance it. It

seems to be now or never, for there is no eluding that fellow any longer. I must either keep *mum* and fly, or else make a bold attempt to realise all the capital I can on this little secret at once . . . . Let me see; the chances in my favour are :—first, the lad has disappeared, bearing the blame in silence—filial piety which I dared hardly expect, and certainly could never have counted on; second, he does not know anything of my whereabouts, not having recognised his dad in this venerable wig and beard ; nor do the aristocrats up there yet know me to be their ancient pensioner—I begged of madame the other day and she never recognised me ; third, the heirs of the late Count—rest his soul—will be even more anxious than he was to have the secret kept, now the crime of murder (for in self-defence I must keep up that fiction) is added to that of plebeian blood, and certain other little trifles, as a stain on the family scutcheon. They will buy it, I think, for a trifle more than those five *louis*, which I can also pocket by selling my second-hand goods for new, before my friend the barber has time to discover my little previous traffic. Then—well, my aristocrats will be safely caged, and can't turn on me, and I can carry my gains with me beyond seas, so that even if my son—ha ! ha !—should hear of the accusation and turn on his poor father with a counter-charge in revenge, I am out of the way.

Hem, Matelinn Gourven, my friend; promising, is it not?

Now let us calculate the chances against; firstly, my

aristocrats mayn't bite—don't know the value of the secret, don't care, *etcetera*. Scarcely, I think; secondly, hearing it, they may turn on *me*—fit the cap on the right head, *etcetera*. Hardly, if you manage well, my friend. Anyhow, I will have the money first, and they will soon be in the keeping of the nation; thirdly, that barber and his troop may catch me playing traitor—*that* would be awkward indeed; but I think I have time enough—'tis worth the risk, anyhow. *Allons*, my friend, be quick—set a few spies in case, for the look of the thing, and then, hey for Coëtmor and my confession! Ha, though! whom shall I make to—the Chevalier, or the Count? Saints aid me, there's a poser! Let's see, who will pay most? Well, I think the young man—I don't know though, it concerns the other more nearly. Well, chance must determine. *Presto*, my friend, thou hast no time to lose!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PAST AND PRESENT.

"Memory, with sad eyes,
Holding the folded annals of my youth."
TENNYSON—"*The Gardiner's Daughter.*"

YVONNE waited till all was silent; she did not even stir from her cramped position till, as she concluded, the two conspirators had had ample time to get clear off; then she rose, trembling in every limb, crossed herself, murmured a prayer, and turned homewards, the black cow keeping close behind her.

The mist still clung thick and white round the sodden earth; but the wind was rising a little, and here and there the curtain began to lift slightly, showing now one gaunt menhir, now another. It showed something else when the girl and the cow entered the lane which led to the village—namely, a lame beggar, on a pair of rude crutches, posted in the middle of the road like a sentinel.

He eyed the pair closely, then moved aside to let them pass, neglecting to use his usual whining petition for a a little *sou* or a piece of bread. This was a significant fact, and after what she had overheard, the girl quickly drew her inference — namely, that conspirator number two had

already began his work, and that this was one of the spies set on anyone who might be going to, or coming from the Château.

"Probably he is not lame, after all," she thought, knowing the tricks of many of the fraternity of the wallet; and she went on, with the uncomfortable feeling of being watched, till she was out of sight.

Securing Blackthorn in the cow-shed, Yvonne ascended the ladder, her heart beating for the safety of her fugitive, in spite of what she had heard the conspirators say of their ignorance of his whereabouts; but Christophe was there all safe, and sleeping profoundly, his great limbs stretched upon the hay, and his dark face, looking sadly worn in spite of its youth, just touched by the misty ray which sloped through a loophole in the wall.

The girl stood over him, gazing intently, as though she would learn the features all by heart; though indeed, poor soul, she had them there already.

He stirred in his sleep, and his lips opened and murmured a name. It was Genofa's. The girl heard it, and her noble brow contracted as with pain; she clasped her hands tightly together for one moment; the next they were relaxed, and a finger raised to her forehead to cross out the involuntary frown with the holy sign.

"I must wake him," she murmured; "and yet—my God, it will be to see him go! I know it, I know it! We

may never meet again; yet I must hasten the parting—God help me!"

An upward glance made the words a prayer. Then she stooped and softly called him by his name.

The lad started, looked up wildly, saw who it was, and raised himself into a sitting posture.

"Christophe, my friend," said the girl, softly, "I have something to tell thee. Don't be afraid; it is God who has let me hear it." And, kneeling by him on the hay, she told him all.

Christophe listened intently, and when she had finished he started up.

"I must go," he said—"I must warn them at once. Don't keep me, I say," he added, impatiently, as Yvonne laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"But, listen a moment," she said, in her soft, calm voice; and such was its tone, that the impatient lad could not choose but listen. "How wilt thou go?" she asked. "Think; all the avenues are watched, and even if thou couldst get past, they would recognise thee; and, after that accusation, wouldst thou be believed, supposing even the Seigneur should grant an interview? Think, Christophe, what good wouldst thou do them as a prisoner in the Château dungeons?"

The lad stamped his foot.

"It is true," he said—"it is true; but I must risk it on the barest chance. Yvonne, wouldst have me

—*me*, of all people — leave them to fall into this snare unwarned?"

"No," she answered, quietly, "*I* will go."

"But how? They will not let thee pass, Yvonne. And those villains—a girl like thee—who knows what they might not do?"

She thought a moment.

"Listen, Christophe," she said, presently: "dost remember the path through the wood, the door behind the summer-house, and the spiral stair? Dost remember, when Aunt Tina was housekeeper there, in our childish days, and we used to play at the Château? Dost remember how, one day, we found the door, thou and I, and she made us swear on the Crucifix, never to tell the secret? Ah, how frightened she was, the dear good aunt!"

"I remember. Yes, I can go that way. They will not watch the wood-path, if they do not know about the door. Let me go, Yvonne."

"But listen again. We must go together. I will not keep thee back, Christophe, for I cannot open the door alone, that statue which hides it is too heavy for me to move; but *I* must be the one to go in and give the warning. Indeed, Christophe, it is the only way."

The lad thought a moment.

"Thou art right, Yvonne," he said, presently. We will go together. Come, let us waste no time; it grows dusk already, and this mist will help to hide us."

They went down the ladder into the dwelling-room All was very still. The wood-fire smouldered upon the hearth ; the large old Crucifix loomed out from the gloom beside the large bed, where lay the old man. His granddaughter went to look at him before starting ; she knew he was past missing her now ; for day and night had been alike for weeks past to old Perik Guenedon. Christophe stood by the door, waiting impatiently.

Yvonne bent over the withered face. How beautiful it looked ! There was not a sign of pain, and the usual heavy breathing was hushed.

" Dear grandfather, he sleeps like a child," she murmured. Then, with a sudden impulse, she bent to kiss his brow. It was cold as that of a statue !

The girl uttered a cry. Christophe heard, came to her, looked also, and saw how it was. The old man's last sleep was over, and his soul had wakened in another world than this !

The girl sank on her knees with a sob, and buried her face in the bed-clothes. The young kloärek hesitated a moment, then knelt beside her, and repeated one of the prayers for the dying. Then he rose ; but the girl knelt on, silent and motionless. Christophe was at his wits' end ; he looked at the window ; the gloom was gathering ; he looked at the girl ; she seemed to have forgotten everything but her sudden loss. Yet their errand was one of life and death !

Gently, but firmly, he put his hand on her shoulder. She started at his touch, and looked up.

"Yvonne," he said, gently, "we must not forget the living in the dead—*he* would not have wished it. He will not want thee now, Yvonne."

"No; he will not want me!" she cried, with a sudden burst of passionate grief. "No one will want me ever any more! never—never, never!"

Then, on a sudden, she calmed herself.

"Come, I am ready," she said; and she covered the old man's face, took his old lanthorn from the wall, and left the house without another word.

Out of the village, along the hedge-row on its inner side, they went; keeping to the fields, avoiding the lanes, hidden by the mist and gloom, and stopped by no one. Side by side they went, over the fallen leaves, with never a word between them, startling a rabbit now and then, but seeing no other living being. Then into the wood, and along a winding path, little used but by four-footed passengers, for it was choked by fern and brushwood in several places, and the briars had thrown themselves across in many a thorny garland. The mist hung thick among the branches overhead, and dripped in slow drops upon the mouldering vegetation which strewed the ground. Death and decay were in the damp, still air. They neared the Château. A wilderness was on this side—an unkempt tangle of shrubs, which had once been a garden

when there was a Seigneur de Coëtmor always in residence. The De Kerdec'h family had always preferred their own ancestral home in the north, and Château Coëtmor had been neglected in consequence.

The November twilight was thickening fast; our two friends could see little through it but a high-pointed gable, with a weathercock atop, showing between two tall poplars, and a little light already twinkling in a window half way up.

They entered the garden, past the old stone fountain, with its moss-grown nymph emptying a pitcher—which, indeed, poor thing, she need not have troubled to do, seeing there had been no water in it since the two were children—down the garden steps, with the stone balustrade, the roost of four aged peacocks, too old and sleepy to scream an alarm, and into My Lady's Bower.

This was an ancient summer-house, placed with its back to the Château wall, smothered in creepers, and approached through a maze—well named, but better now, perhaps, than when some bygone Comtesse de Coëtmor had it constructed to increase the difficulties of those who would penetrate to her bower. Inside the summer-house it was quite dark; but the memory of childhood's days is strong, and Christophe and Yvonne had no difficulty in finding their way. They felt about for the stone statue of Flora which stood in a niche at the back, found it in the old place, struck a light (the materials for which had been

carried there by Yvonne), shaded it carefully, and set themselves to the task of unmasking the secret door.

The light gleamed on the green-stained person of the Goddess of Flowers, on her mossy limbs and lichen-garnished face. Truly she was no beauty, and a broken nose made her still less so.

Yvonne smiled, in spite of the gravity of the situation, as she looked on poor Flora's pitiful plight, and remembered the childish romp which had in part been the cause of it.

"Dost remember toppling her over and breaking her nose, Christophe?" she whispered.

"Ay," he returned, in the same cautious voice; "we should never have discovered the door but for that accident."

Moving Flora from her niche, a little round-headed rivet in the stonework was found and pressed, which caused a portion of it to turn on a pivot, disclosing a low, narrow door. Another spring opened this, and the two found themselves at the foot of a spiral stair, which seemed to wind upwards in the thickness of the wall. They entered, cautiously closing the door behind them, and began the giddy ascent. Presently Yvonne, who was in advance, reached a narrow landing, from which a passage, narrower still, turned off to the left. She turned, signed to Christophe to stay where he was, followed it a few paces, and stopped outside a door similar to the one below.

Voices sounded from within!

Again the girl glanced round at where her companion stood holding the light, put her finger to her lips, beckoned to him, and remained listening, with her hand on the spring.

CHAPTER IX.

MATELINN GOURVEN'S LITTLE SECRET.

"If head be bowed and heart be sore,
Reason enow have I therefor."
"*Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*"

FATE, as the klaskervara put it to himself, decided the knotty question for him simply enough.

"To which of the Seigneurs can I speak?" he asked the lackey who opened the door to him. "I come on important business."

The lackey looked at him, and hesitated a moment. He saw the man's position by his dress, and, had the times been in their normal condition, would probably have sent him about his business; but, as things were, the seeming beggar might, as likely as not, be the bearer of an important message from some of the Chouan leaders, with whom the servant shrewdly suspected his master was about to connect himself, and to repulse him might be dangerous.

"I will see," he said, civilly, and retired into the house.

"Monsieur le Comte left home early this morning," he said, returning presently; "but Monsieur le Chevalier will see you. Step this way."

"Good," answered the klaskervara aloud, adding to himself, "So?—ah, then, it is probably just as well."

He followed the servant across the hall, and the inner vestibule, where Christophe had waited the day before, and then up a staircase which led to the suite of rooms set apart for the Chevalier de Kerdec'h.

The Chevalier was sitting in his usual position by the wood-fire, with his forehead leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed on the glowing logs. He looked up as the klaskervara entered, and signed to him to come forward, while the lackey, on another sign, withdrew.

Matelinn Gourven approached as far as the wolf-skin which lay before the fire, and there remained standing. The Chevalier did not offer him a seat, or make any movement himself beyond a slight bend of the head; that done, he almost seemed to forget that anyone was present, and relapsed into his usual state of profound and dreamy melancholy.

For once in a way Matelinn Gourven's native audacity was at fault; he even felt not altogether at his ease. It is embarrassing at any time to have one's presence entirely ignored, and the errand on which the klaskervara had come, made the reception he was receiving more than unpleasant.

"This won't do," thought our rascally acquaintance, after waiting some minutes without result,—"this won't do." He coughed slightly.

The Chevalier started and looked up.

"Ah, I forgot," he said. "Pardon me, sir; did you want anything?"

"Want anything, indeed!" said the visitor, *sotto voce*,—"I should just think I did."

What he said aloud was: "Monsieur will excuse me for importuning him; but I am here on business of the greatest importance. I have a secret to confide to Monsieur which has been kept from him too long; but first he must promise to forgive me my share in the wrong, and——"

"What?" asked the Chevalier, absently; he seemed to have lost the thread of the discourse, and to be in danger of again forgetting the matter in hand.

The klaskervara saw that he must come to the front.

"Monsieur will remember a young peasant girl of Léon, called Rozenne Miorcec?"

The Chevalier started as though struck by an electric shock; rose hastily and stretched out his hands, trembling all over, and vainly trying to speak. But the klaskervara went on unmoved.

"Monsieur would like to hear what became of her? Well, if he will swear to me on the Crucifix not to make any use against me of what I am ready to tell him, and will give me a hundred louis (or say two hundred?) I may perhaps be able——"

But the Chevalier had found voice, and interrupted him

with words which were almost a cry, so piteous, so tremblingly eager was the tone in which they were uttered.

"A hundred louis? Yes, yes, two hundred if you will —that is (with an anxious look) if I have them. Anything to hear—to hear of *her*. Ah, have pity—speak, tell me! *Mon Dieu*, how it pains me *here!*"

He laid his hand upon his heart, turned very white, and gasped.

"But the money—I must have it first," said the hard voice of the klaskervara.

The Chevalier went to a secretary, unlocked it, drew out a secret drawer, and counted out its contents before the klaskervara with trembling fingers. There were one hundred and thirty louis.

"Take them, I have no more; these are hard times for us," said the Chevalier, looking up wistfully at the ragged rogue and pushing the coins towards him.

"Are they not enough?" he added, nervously, as the other greedily pocketed them, and still held out his hand. "Indeed I have no more. Ah, tell me about her, for the love of God!"

"Yes, if you will give me that ring into the bargain,' replied the klaskervara, fixing his covetous eyes on a curiously-engraved gold ring which the gentleman wore.

Raoul de Kerdech pulled it off.

"It was my mother's," he said, with a sigh. "But no matter, I *must* hear, cost what it may.

"I wish I had known sooner what a soft he is, and how easy my task would be," reflected Matelinn Gourven, "I would have found a market before this, and effected a better sale, good as this is. Well, well, it's done now. Now for the story, and a short cut, too; or, I shall be cut short—ha, ha! At present, Monsieur will take the little oath," he added aloud, with a gracious smile; "then the secret is his; I ask nothing more."

The Chevalier drew a Crucifix from his bosom, and in a voice, shaking under the pressure of cruel suspense, swore as desired. Then he tottered back to his chair, sank into it, leaned his head upon his hands, and said, in a faint voice :—

"Begin."

"If Monsieur will allow me, I also will take a chair," said the ragged visitor with cool effrontery, and sat down opposite the gentleman.

"Monsieur is sure no one is listening?" he went on, with a glance round the room. "Ah, well, then we will begin. Monsieur remembers Rozenne Miorcec? Yes? Of course. She was a rare village beauty, and first love is not easily forgotten. She was Monsieur's first love, as I am aware; perhaps he is not aware that she was also *my* first admiration? No? Well, of course, she preferred Monsieur—that goes without saying, when the choice was between a peasant and an aristocrat. Monsieur saw a good deal of her, I believe; more than the late M. le Comte de

Kerdec'h quite liked. There were reasons, he feared, that Monsieur's sympathies were being enlisted too strongly on the side of the lower orders; he feared, too, that the—what shall I say?—connexion with the beautiful Rozenne might lead to a *mésalliance*: he knew Monsieur's high principles and feared the charms of the Rose of Léon. Ah, she *was* a beauty! Fresh as the flower she was named after, graceful as a fawn, and sweet as the morning air!"

The Chevalier uttered a quivering sigh.

"Monsieur thinks so?" continued the klaskervara, "Well, I thought so also, and, naturally, I did not love Monsieur the better for it. Yet, with all her charms, the Count was right. The old blue blood of the De Kerdec'h's would have been terribly contaminated had it mixed with that which ran in the sweet veins of a common peasant girl. Yes, yes, that goes without saying. Also there was a clause in the marriage settlements of Monsieur's mother, who was a De Coëtmor, that, failing male heirs to the Comte de Coëtmor her brother, all that great estate should pass to her second son (supposing she had one) if he married and became the father of a son who was to carry on the name, otherwise her eldest son was to be Comte de Kerdec'h and Coëtmor. A marriage, therefore, between Monsieur and the lovely Rozenne would at once blot the family escutcheon and alienate a goodly estate. Naturally M. le Comte objected to this. I was willing to assist in preventing such a catastrophe. Brief, I persuaded the fair

Rozenne of Monsieur's inconstancy, and confided her to the care of a family I knew in Saint-Brieuc. A child was born——"

He was interrupted by a cry from the Chevalier, who leaned eagerly forward.

"Rozenne insisted that she was Monsieur's lawful wife I know not if she spoke truth, but the family were incredulous——"

"Heavens! dared anyone deny it?" cried the Chevalier in a dry, choked voice. "She was my wife,—yes. Ah! God that I had known!" He sank his head on his hands and groaned.

"*Whew-w-w!* So the lad will be Comte de Coëtmor then after all," said the klaskervara, *sotto voce;* after which he glanced at the clock, started, and went on hurriedly:—"The family in charge of Rozenne informed us—that is, myself and Monsieur the late Count—of the event which had taken place. It was decided to remove the child. The poor thing found this out and fled. We searched for her, but in vain. All trace had disappeared, both of herself and her infant. At last, quite unexpectedly, when I was on one of my usual pilgrimages, I found her as she lay dying under a menhir on Carnac Plain——"

The Chevalier drew a quivering breath. "Dead!" he moaned,—"dead! and she never knew——"

"The infant was alive," went on the klaskervara, with

business-like unconcern. "I took him to Antonn Comorre's wife, and she brought him up as my son——"

"Does he still live? For God's sake, tell me?" asked the poor father, with a wistful eagerness, which would have melted any heart but that of Matelinn Gourven.

"Live? Well, yes, he lives; but, so to say, with the halter round his neck; for I am sorry to have to tell Monsieur that his late brother, the Count de Kerdec'h, met his death at the hands of this precious son of —— Ha! what's this? Villain, you have betrayed me!"

CHAPTER X.

UNTO DEATH.

"I could but hope that time might show
How pure was the love my heart could know.
* * * * * * * *
There was no end for such love but death."

W. SAWYER—"*Ten Miles from Town.*"

A SLIGHT sound, like the click of a spring, had broken the quiet of the room.

The Chevalier took his hands hurriedly from his face, as the klaskervara uttered his exclamation, and saw the tapestry lifted to admit two figures.

Yvonne stood first, her noble face stern with indignation; Christophe followed her, his features convulsed with conflicting emotions, his breath coming thick and fast.

The two occupants of the room had risen to their feet and were standing, struck with astonishment. Terror also was in the look of the klaskervara, but the interruption had come so suddenly as to take from him for the moment all power of escape. Before he could move from his place, his arms were pinioned by the young kloärek, and he was forced back into his seat.

"You have lied!" he said, passionately—"you have

lied! I may speak now, since I know you are not my father. I owe you nothing—less than nothing, for you have been very cruel to me. Monsieur," he went on, turning to the Chevalier, and speaking in a changed tone—"*Father!* I am no murderer, though, in my ignorance, that man there made a tool of me, and poisoned my whole life with the horror of it. 'Twas *he* who did the deed. I may say it now to clear myself."

The face of the white-haired gentleman had turned pale with overpowering emotion; his lips were working, and the tears running down his cheeks. When Christophe called him "Father," he opened his arms, and as the last words were concluded he tottered forward with a cry—"My son—my son!" and sank, trembling and sobbing like a woman, on the breast of the young man.

Yvonne stood in the background, looking on, and feeling the sad isolation of the stranger who must not intermeddle with this joy. Yet her presence was not unnecessary. She alone was watching the klaskervara, feeling that there was danger there. In his cunning face there was the look of a beast of prey who is lying in wait, biding his time to spring, as he sat there crouched up in the seat where Christophe had forced him. He did not move; he seemed afraid of attracting attention, yet the girl could see that he was watching intently.

Presently, before even her quick ear had detected anything, she noticed that he lifted his head slightly, and

turned his eyes in the direction of a door, partly concealed by a curtain, situated in that part of the room opposite to where she stood. From her knowledge of the house, she knew that it led to an antechamber, communicating with some bedrooms, and with a staircase leading into this particular wing from the main building. She watched the man closely, thinking that, so soon as he could find an opportunity to spring up unobserved, it was his intention to make a rush for this door.

Yet he did not seem to be watching only; he seemed to be listening also. Was that a sound?

Yvonne glanced towards the father and son, but they were still too absorbed in mutual explanations to have eyes or ears for anything else.

She remembered the mission of Barber Postik, yet it seemed full early for him to return from Auray, and she remembered also that he had appointed a rendezvous with the klaskervara outside the Château. Surely he would go there first?

Yet the girl was uneasy. She longed to cut short the interview between father and son with a word of warning; but hesitated to intrude. They seemed to have forgotten her very presence. Thoughts take long to write, but they are swift in their passage through the mind.

Five minutes, perhaps, had passed since Christophe and Yvonne entered the room, certainly not more, much as had been pressed into it; yet the girl felt that each

moment carried peril with it. Again she took her eyes from the klaskervara a moment, and was opening her lips to speak, when a sudden sound at the door attracted her attention. The wood fire had done blazing, and was sending a warm red glow all over the room, and in the glow, standing just within the doorway, she saw the figure of a man with a pistol in his hand.

The klaskervara was making signs to him.

The girl uttered a sudden cry, not a loud one, for the imminence of the danger almost took from her the power of voice.

At her cry, the figure vanished behind the curtain, the klaskervara sprang up and made a rush for the door, and the young kloärek turned as suddenly and threw himself in his path.

In another second, Matelinn Gourven was struggling in Christophe's grasp!

"*A moi, Citoyen!*" he shrieked, and before Yvonne had time to reach the door and carry out her intention of bolting it on the inside, the intruder was again on the threshold with the muzzle of his pistol pointing full at the young kloärek.

Without a thought but for his safety, the girl flung herself before him. There was a flash, a loud report, and in an instant the room was filled with smoke.

As though both had been shot, the two combatants sprang asunder; Christophe made a rush for the door,

and the Barber, utterly taken by surprise at this sudden onslaught from the man whom he thought he had shot, sprang back from the threshold.

With the quickness of thought, the young man had closed the heavy oaken door, drawn across it the great wooden bar, sunk in the thickness of the wall, which served it as a bolt, and returned into the room.

"It was a near thing," he said, still panting with excitement. "You villain! this is *your* doing. Monsieur —Father, can you get me something to blindfold and bind him with, and then we must begone. See how it has frightened poor Yvonne—she has fainted!"

In the dim red glow of the fire, which was all the light in the large old room, he did not see that the girl, as she lay apparently fainting on the floor, was pressing her apron to her breast to stanch the blood which flowed from it, and was clenching her teeth in agony to keep in the moans of pain, lest they should reveal what had happened and retard the escape of her companions.

Her unselfishness bore its fruit. The two men, thinking it was only a swoon, put off attending to her till they had secured their dangerous visitor, tied him securely hand and foot, bound a bandage about his eyes, and gagged his mouth. Before this was done, the tramp of feet was heard on the stairs, voices sounded outside the door, and there was an attempt to force it open. The strong oak resisted.

"Open, in the name of the nation!" exclaimed a voice,

and then came a heavy cannonade of knocking. Christophe saw that if they were to effect their escape, it must be done immediately. He opened the concealed door, snatched up the lanthorn from the passage outside, where he had left it, and gave it to his father with a few hasty words of explanation; then he lifted Yvonne in his arms, signed to the Chevalier to follow, and passed through the door.

The old man kept his eyes fixed upon his son, obedient to his every word and sign. He did not speak, he seemed, but for that one fixed attention, to be walking in a dream, quite unmindful of pursuit and peril; for his mild eyes shone, and his face had that blissful look which one sometimes sees on the face of a sleeping child, who smiles at some bright vision of the night.

In Christophe's mind, on the contrary, the imminence of the situation and the feeling that the safety of the whole party was dependent upon him, thrust aside for the moment all thought of the revelation he had just heard. The sense of joy and relief could not yet be dwelt on—scarcely even felt; anxiety was uppermost, and all his energies were wanted for action.

Under his directions, the door was closed, and the Chevalier de Kerdec'h passed him in the narrow way, and went on first down the stair, carrying the light. Christophe followed with Yvonne; but he kept his eyes on the lanthorn, and did not notice what had happened to the girl.

She was suffering intensely; yet she never uttered a sound. The cold dews of agony broke out on her large white brow; a deadly faintness stole over her; she thought she would have died before the last downward step was taken, and she felt the cold night air blowing on her face. They were in the summer-house. There Christophe set her down, and she heard him helping the Chevalier to replace the statue.

"She does not seem to revive, poor thing," she heard him say, as he lifted her once more and went out into the maze—"Hide the light, Monsieur; the garden may be watched, and it would betray us. Now follow me."

They went down the garden paths unseen; they entered the wood. The cold mist-drops fell from the trees upon her face. She prayed silently that God would help her to endure, to hide her pain, till a place of safety were reached; where that was to be she did not think. And God did help her. The pain ebbed slowly; she felt nothing but the arms which held her, and his heart beating against hers. Had she passed from purgatory to paradise? the girl wondered dumbly. Then the faintness returned upon her, and before they were out of the wood all knowledge, all feeling, had passed away, and she lay as one dead in the arms of the man for whom she had given her life!

CHAPTER XI.

"FOR HIM."

"*Elsie.* My life is little,
Only a cup of water,
But pure and limpid.
Take it, O my Prince!
Let it refresh you—
Let it restore you.
It is given willingly—
It is given freely;
May God bless the gift!"

LONGFELLOW—"*The Golden Legend.*"

"AH, the poor thing, she is dying! dying! Pitiful heavens, to think of it—and no doctor! for that barber fellow is off, and they do say now that he was a Blue in disguise. Ah, sweet saints, but it is pitiful!"

And tender-hearted Ninorc'h Comorre, into whose house they had carried the fainting girl, bent over her as she lay on the *lis clos* in the great farm kitchen, and burst into a flood of tears.

Genofa was standing by, white with horror; but Christophe did not seem to see her: he thrust Ninorc'h aside, and bent, in his turn, over the bed with a terrible feeling at his heart.

"Dying!" he exclaimed. "No, no, it is only a swoon.

They shot at me, and she was frightened. My God!" he exclaimed, after a pause, as he caught sight of the blood slowly welling from the bosom of the unconscious girl—"My God, can it be that the shot struck *her?* Ah! Yvonne, Yvonne, speak, tell me how it was. Ah, no, it cannot, *cannot* be! Is there *no* one here who can help her?"

He turned towards the others a white, appealing look.

Ninorc'h turned to her husband, who was standing open-mouthed in the middle of the room, too much dismayed by the suddenness of the disaster to be capable of a suggestion.

"Come, then, great-mouth," she exclaimed, with the fretted asperity which comes of pain and of powerlessness to cope with a terrible disaster—"come, then, what art staring at? Go and fetch the Father."

"Dom Cleménçz?"

"Ay; who else? Ah, truly, it was the good God that brought him here just in the nick of time! Yes, Yvonne, yes, my lamb; he is coming—the good father is coming, and will know how to help thee. Ah, God! do not moan so, my sweet; it cuts me to the heart!"

And Ninorc'h, utterly vanquished, threw her apron over her face, and burst out crying once more. Antonn Comorre had left the room. No one spoke. Only the burning wood puffed and tinkled in the great fireplace; the tender house-mother sobbed and sighed, and the November wind moaned in the withering foliage outside.

The lights and shadows from the fire danced across the dark oak beams of the old Breton kitchen, basking and glooming on the Virgin's shrine between the beds which Genofa decked daily, and lending a mysterious solemnity to the great Crucifix nailed upon the wall. The glow fell upon the aristocratic figure of the tall Chevalier, who leant against the chimney-piece and looked into the embers on the hearth; it shone less strongly on Christophe's strong form, as he stood by the bed with hands clasped tightly together, face bent, and features working convulsively. Genofa and her mother were beyond its ruddy influence, clasping each other like frightened children in the gloom; but the flickering light played across the face of the girl who lay white and still upon the bed, forcing herself to be calm, as the pain of consciousness stole again over her aching senses.

Presently, as Christophe's painful breathing rose to a sudden sob, she stretched out a white, limp hand, damp with the dews of coming death, laid it softly upon his, and smiled as an angel might.

"Christophe," she said, in a whisper, which did not reach beyond him, "don't mind, dear; I am content. For him," she murmured, presently, as her mind wandered a little—I die, for him! My God, I thank thee!"

Then silence fell again. Only the fire puffed and tinkled on the hearth, and voices moaned softly within and without; moaned silently with such human sadness round

the old farmhouse that the peasant women hushed their sobs and listened awestruck, whispering to each other, "It is the spirits! She will not last long, poor thing—the death-angels are coming for her soul!" And they told their beads and murmured a prayer for the dying.

The door opened and the old fatherly priest came in, followed by the stalwart farmer. He paused a moment to pronounce the message of peace in his sonorous Latin, and then went up to the bed and bent over the dying girl. It was he who had baptized her as an infant, who had prepared her for her Confirmation and administered to her her First Communion. Into his fatherly ear had been poured all the little secrets, all the small failings of her all but spotless soul; and now he was about to hear her dying confession, and to administer to her the last Sacraments of the Church, rites which he and all present knew full well might at any moment be interrupted by the soldiers of the Republic. All knew it—knew the danger of discovery; but all were loyal Bretons, and not for any fear of man would they let a soul go out into the unknown without the consolation and guidance of the Church.

Yvonne saw the old man as he bent over her; a light came into her fading eyes, she smiled and stretched out her arms to him like a child.

The priest took the cold, moist hands in his, folded them tenderly together, and then, at a word from him, the others silently left the room, while the dying girl made her last

confession. When they came in again and knelt for the last Sacraments, there was a heavenly calm upon the poor pale face, but the old priest's voice was quivering with emotion and the tears trickling slowly over his wrinkled cheeks.

"She is a saint," he said aside to Ninorc'h, when the last prayer was ended. "I have been at many a death-bed, and heard many a dying confession, but never one like this. She is purity itself, sweet child—worthy to follow the Lamb, if ever mortal soul were worthy. Ah, God be merciful to us sinners—how far we come behind! Yes leave them alone together; is she not a saint?" he continued, as a faint voice from the bed pleaded for a few words alone with Christophe. And the two were left together.

"Christophe—brother," said the dying girl, in her low calm voice, "sit down beside me; I have something to say."

He came and knelt by the bed. There was an awe upon him, a sense of reverent homage, as at a sacred presence, which would not let him take a posture less humble.

"Christophe," she said, "I heard all with thee to-night—the story of thy birth, and I thank God for and with thee, dear Christophe. Now thou canst hold up thy head like a man, and I know thou wilt not belie thy birth, but wilt do thy duty before God in the position He has given thee

But, Christophe, keep faith; do not forget Genofa now thou art a gentleman. She is but a peasant maiden, but—she loves thee, and—ah, God, it *hurts* to pour out all one's heart unheeded!"

She paused a moment, and looked into the young man's face with a glance which was almost frightened. Had she betrayed herself? But no, he did not seem to guess.

"And I love *her!*" that was what he said, and he said it with an intensity which carried conviction. "God knows that, Yvonne. But — ah, Yvonne, can I turn back *now*—a second time? Can I deny myself to God when He has showed me this mercy? Am I not bound—*bound?* Ah, me, it is hard to feel my hands fettered just when life seemed brightening — opening before me! just when the burden seemed falling off! Yes. But, ah, Yvonne, I fear it is too late! a priest I vowed to make myself when I was in misery, and a priest I must be!

Yvonne saw the bitterness with which the lad's soul was chafing under an uncongenial lot, and she smiled, with the calm pity of one who sees more clearly than those who are struggling amidst the dust of life's turmoil.

"Hast never heard of rash vows, my friend?" she asked, with a faint flash of humour. "*Thine* was one. No, no, my friend, thou wilt never make into a priest worth having — never, never! 'Tis not thy vocation,

Christophe. Thou wilt be a good husband, a tender father, a seigneur who can understand and feel for his people like one of themselves! But a priest—no!"

"I know it," said the lad, humbly. "I know it, Yvonne. I should not be worthy to stand behind the humblest in the sacred ministry. But, oh, Yvonne, I wish I could see God's will about it as thou seemst to do!"

"Christophe, listen!" she said, solemnly. "In a few hours I shall have gone from this world. The dying see clearly sometimes. I have long thought that Bernèz was wrong in persuading thee to be a priest, and now I seem to be certain of it. Oh, Christophe!" she continued, raising her steadfast eyes, with a look of rapt vision, "God is not as thou and others think Him. He is no hard task-master forcing His people to make brick without the straw. He is a loving, tender Father. Thinkest thou He would deny the spirit if it were His will to have thee for His priest? No, no; He has sent thee no call; it is not His will—do not kick against the pricks Christophe," she went on, with increasing fervour. "I am dying in thy place—no, no, do not thank me! I am content—but since it is so, my friend, wilt thou not promise me *one* thing, one little thing, Christophe?"

"Anything, Yvonne, anything — for thou wilt ask me nothing that is wrong. Heavens! could I deny thee anything—lying there like that—dying for me!"

The young kloärek's voice was passionate and thick with emotion.

"Well, promise me this, Christophe," went on the dying girl. "Promise, at least, to pause and think well before taking any final vows. Ah, think well before doing what may wreck thy whole life, both here and hereafter; for if I know thee, Christophe, thou art one to grow hard and reckless under the constant fretting of an unloved yoke. Ah, think what the sin would be to touch the sacred mysteries of God's sanctuary with a profaning hand! Thou mightest come to that, Christophe—even that, and—ah! do not let me have the pain of knowing that what I have done has been worse than vain! Better for thee to have died, Christophe, than live to lose thyself. I think—ah! God—I think 'twould break my heart to know *that*, even were I in Thy Paradise!"

Her voice had grown faint and low; but a flush of emotion had risen to her cheeks, and her eyes looked at Christophe with a light in them which he could not bear.

"I promise to do nothing rashly," he said, his face quivering with strong emotion;—"I promise—— My God! what is *that*; what are *any* promises in return, when she is dying for me? Dying! What am I, that such as she should die for me? I never knew—I never guessed—— Ah, Yvonne; dear, sweet Yvonne!" sobbed the lad, carried quite out of himself by gratitude, grief, admiration, and a pity, which, for the moment, awoke in him a passionate

feeling for the stricken girl, which he had never felt for her in health. "Must thou *really* die? I think it will break my heart—I think——"

"Hush!"

His sudden outbreak of feeling, though she did not for a moment estimate it above its real value, sent a quiver of answering emotion through the heart of the dying girl. If he could only have loved her! Ah! what paradise it would have been. Would Genofa ever be to him what *she* could have been? But no; she must not think of that. Yet, though she put it from her, the emotions awakened were too much for the ebbing life. Yvonne clasped her hands convulsively, and grew very pale.

"I can say no more," she whispered in a voice of exhaustion;—"talk to Dom Cleménez; he thinks as I do. Call the others, please. Oh, if Bernèz were but here!"

Frightened at her looks, Christophe summoned the others, who came in and stood or knelt around the bed, while Ninorc'h, with tears streaming down her face, moistened the poor white lips with wine.

For a long time, Yvonne lay in perfect silence; then she revived a little, turned with a little flickering smile towards Christophe and Genofa, who were kneeling beside her, lifted a hand of each, and held them together in both of hers, with a look which Christophe at least understood better than words.

"God bless you!" she murmured.

Then suddenly her eyes lit and she turned them eagerly towards the door.

"He is coming," she said, in a stronger voice,—"he is coming—I hear him! Ah, quick—let him in!"

The watchers looked at each other with awe-stricken faces. All had the same thought, and no one moved to open the door, for each thought in his heart—"'Tis the Angel of Death: her soul hears him, though we cannot."

Still the girl listened eagerly.

"Why do you not open," she said again, "do I not tell you he is coming?"

But still no one stirred; only the old priest murmured the prayers for the dying, and the others crossed themselves and watched her face. The wind moaned round the house, and the fire crackled on the hearth. Then, in the silence, three knocks sounded on the door. The watchers started with a great fear. Genofa gave a smothered shriek.

"Can you not open?" said the dying voice again, with a touch of impatience in it, "he is come to me, and will you shut him out?"

Then the old priest rose, took the Crucifix from the wall, and walked towards the door. "In God's name, then," he said solemnly, and undid the bolts.

Ninorc'h and Genofa hid their faces, they did not dare to look on what might enter. The Chevalier and Antonn crossed themselves and gazed with eyes of fear. Only the girl showed no sign of terror. She stretched out her arms

and smiled. A dark figure entered, looked neither to right nor left, but went straight to the bed, opened his arms also, and the two met in a close embrace.

"I *knew* it was thou, my Bernèz," she said, with soft content. "Ah, thank God, for now my last prayer is granted!" She fell back with a soft smile, and lay looking at him and holding his hand.

"It was a dream," he said, in a strange, still voice—"a dream. I saw thee lying here, Yvonne, and I could not rest till I had come."

"It was *God!*" murmured the girl, and then she shut her eyes, and her lips moved. "Bernèz," she went on presently, in a dreamy voice, "old grandfather is dead! he died this afternoon. Dost think God will let his soul wait somewhere out there till mine is free, that we may go to Him together? Ah! Bernèz, is it not good of God to spare me till the dear old man was gone? What could he have done without me?"

There came another pause; then the girl spoke again. "Bernèz, dear, just tell me once that thou art not discontent with me still, because I could not tread in the path which thou hast chosen? Brother, dear, the old man wanted me, and—my heart was not given that way—I could never have been happy in a convent. But—ah! Bernèz, do not think that I have not tried to serve Him where I was—my God, my God!"

She added the last words softly, with an upward look of beautiful love, as though she had quite forgotten that her question had been addressed to man, and had had her answer straight from God.

"Ah, yes, she is truly a saint, dear child!" murmured the old priest; but the young one said nothing; only he knelt down by the bed and let his brow fall upon his sister's hand with a gesture of intense abasement; for he felt in that hour that all his hard-won sanctity was as nothing in comparison of that which this simple maiden had attained to, all unknown to herself, in the sweet unselfishness of a simple life.

It was Bernèz who kept the last watch by the bed of his dying sister. After awhile the presence of the others seemed to disturb her, for the pain returned upon her from time to time, and she seemed unable to bear the sight of their pitying eyes, and of the anguish which her sufferings caused them.

It was Bernèz who accompanied her pure spirit to the brink of the dark river — who prayed for her the beautiful old prayers which have supported so many faltering steps into the dread shades of death, who held the Crucifix before her glazing eyes, and signed the calm dead brow with holy water!

What she said to him in that last hour, none knew; but when, after all was over, the young priest closed the door

of the death-chamber behind him, and came into the presence of the assembled watchers in the inner room, all the stern austerity which had marked him from boyhood had passed from him, and his face wore the soft humility of a little child.

CHAPTER XII

PROBATION.

"You might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and to wear,
And prove which suited most your place—
His best of hope or his worst despair."
R. BROWNING—"*By the Fireside.*"

"I HAVE a message for thee, Christophe," said Bernèz, after the first burst of grief which followed his announcement was over. "I met the young Seigneur on my way here at the head of a band of peasants. They had just succeeded in routing a detachment from Auray, who had attacked the Château and were carrying off Madame la Comtesse and her daughter, and he bid me tell thee that if, as the leaders thought, Monsieur le Chevalier were with thee, thou and he were to join him and the ladies at Sainte-Anne without delay. For some reason or other they are as bent on catching thee as the Seigneur himself, and he wants to dispatch thee as escort to his uncle and the ladies to the English Isles.* I would have told thee sooner, only——" His voice failed him as he thought of the scene he had just passed through.

"And could we have gone before? Could we have left

* The Channel Islands are so-called in Brittany

her? Ah! Bernèz, dost thou know it was *I* who cost thy sister her life? Canst thou ever forgive me?"

"Hush, I know; but do not let us speak of that, or we shall lose strength for action. Do thy duty, lad, by the family of our Seigneur, and set off at once. I will see to things here."

"But—Bernèz, thou art a proscribed priest;—thou art in danger?"

"We are in God's hands, cousin."

"But—Bernèz, how can I leave the father and mother—and Genofa?"

"They, too, are in Heaven's keeping; besides—I am better informed than thou—I know on good authority that peasants such as they, are in no danger—not yet at least. Father Cleménçz and I will remain in the neighbourhood, somewhere out of sight, as long as possible; and if there be any danger, I will despatch Genofa and the old people to thee; though I believe it would well-nigh break Uncle Antonn's heart to leave the farm and the stock; and as for Aunt Ninorc'h——" He glanced at her as she sat weeping by her linen-chest; and Christophe understood without more words.

So the situation was briefly explained to the others, and Christophe kissed his foster-father and mother, wrung the hand of the younger priest, and knelt for the old man's blessing. Then he turned to Genofa, who was sitting apart from the rest, stupified by grief and horror,

and hardly able to understand that her old companion had returned, and was going away again, all in the one night.

It was no time for explanations, for promises given and exchanged. Christophe felt, as he held the two little hands and looked into the flower-face, drooping like a blossom after rain, that, much as he longed to draw her to his heart, he had no right to pledge himself as yet. He had still to debate the matter with himself, to weigh the dying counsel of Yvonne, to seek the advice she had recommended to him, to do what in him lay to find out the will of God and do it. Full well he knew that in such stormy times as these the parting might be for ever; that he and his bonnie love might meet no more in this world. But that interview with Yvonne, as she lay a-dying, had strengthened the young man to do what was right, and he resisted the temptation.

So he only pressed the little hands in his, and asked a blessing on the golden head; then, with one last look at the peaceful face of the dead, he took his father by the hand, and they two went forth into the darkness.

CONCLUSION.

"On better thought you break, as you ought,
Vows—words, no angel set down—some elf
Mistook for an oath, an epigram!"
—"*The Worst of It.*"

"The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."
R. BROWNING.—"*Rabbi Ben Ezra.*"

AND did they meet again?

An answer to this and other questions may be found among the papers of the De Kerdec'h family.

Lying with old deeds and parchments, dating back to the dimmest antiquity, are two letters of comparatively modern date, one written by Christophe de Coëtmor to his cousin and foster-brother Aymon de Kerdec'h, the other an answer to it.

The present representatives of the families will pardon me if I transcribe them here.

St. Heliers, Jersey, 1793.

"DEAR COUSIN AND FOSTER-BROTHER,

"I am no good writer, kloärek though I be (or rather I should say, *have been*, since, by Dom' Cleménçz's advice, I have finally resolved not to enter the priesthood), but I have that to say to thee which I must try and write, and thou wilt forgive the manner.

"Dear Aymon, thou hast always been as a brother to me, even when we knew of no blood-relationship between us, and I can never forget thy reception of me when I told thee my story by the sacred fountain of Madame Sainte-Anne d'Auray. My share in thy father's death was so frankly forgiven; my peasant blood, by the mother's side, so nobly overlooked, my future claim to half the heritage, which has been as thine own, so generously admitted. (Aymon, that claim troubles me, and were it not that my father is the rightful Count de Coëtmor, now his marriage is established, I would fain thou hadst still the title.)

"My brother (for that is a nearer and dearer name than cousin), wilt thou receive as kindly what I have now to tell thee? Wilt thou pardon me if I bring in more peasant blood into the house of which thou art the head?

"I have my father's blessing and sanction—give me thine too, brother, and say thou wilt welcome our little foster-sister, Genofa, as my wife?

"If thou wilt, it will set the crown on our happiness; but if thou wilt not—brother, I will be frank—in any case I cannot give up Genofa. Now that my own heart and Dom Cleménçz have shown me that Yvonne was right in saying that, feeling as I do, I must never be a priest, I belong to Genofa. Honour and love alike pledge me to her. And—ah! brother, since I have seen her again, I know that I love her more than ever, if that were possible.

"Thou mayest have heard that Dom Clemenç judged it wiser to bring her over here with the dear foster-father and mother? Their connexion with aristocrats was beginning to bring suspicion on them, now our dear Brittany is the scene of war.

"Will this ever reach thee, I wonder? I am sending it by one I can trust; yet who knows what may happen in these troublous times!

"May God and the dear saints keep thee, my brother.

"Yours,

CHRISTOPHE DE COËTMOR."

THE REPLY.

"DEAR BROTHER CHRISTOPHE (for, indeed, thou hast always been my brother, since the days when we lived with the wrens under the dear old thatch of Father Antonn's farm).—Thy letter has reached me, after some wanderings back and forward, and now finds me—poor screech-owl that I am—encamped in a wood with other Chouans, waiting to cut off a detachment of Blues. We have had stirring times since we parted at Sainte-Anne. Charette and La Rochjacquelin have led us to many victories, and have shared with us all our sufferings; they have been great, especially after the defeat at Mans; but I will not speak of that. All Brittany and La Vendée are now in arms, and will yet have vengeance on the murderers of the King.

"Yes, Christophe, dear brother, you need not fear that *I* will oppose your marriage with our sweet little foster-sister. She is, as I once said before, pretty enough to tempt Saint Anthony himself; and as for her peasant-blood, since I have been a Chouan, I have learned that no aristocrat can excel our Brittany peasants in all that is best and bravest. Yes, we are all of one blood, we Bretons, and should not hold ourselves so much apart. If we could live more as brothers, and this, I think, our present troubles will teach us to do, we need have no revolutions. So kiss Genofa for me, Christophe, and tell her I greet her as a sister. Don't let us speak of the land. If God prosper us, and the King enjoy his own again, there will be enough for both of us; and if not? Well, in that case, there will be none even to quarrel over! So set thy mind at rest, my brother of the menhir. Alas! perhaps, even, we may never live to meet again! I have seen so much of death and the chances of war during these last few months; but for one thing I can truly thank God, that, if He please to take me, *thou* art there, Christophe, to be a son to my poor uncle and mother, and a brother to little Renée Yes, thank God for that, Christophe.

"Death *has* come near us, very near us already, for he has taken our dear Bernèz. I cannot tell you what he has been to us since we have been on this campaign —tending the wounded, giving the last Sacraments to

the dying, exhorting the living so to live that death may find them ready; and so tenderly, so gently, he might have been the humblest among us sinners, instead of a saint, as he truly was.

"Christophe, I can scarcely tell thee. One day he ventured too far to see a dying man, whom we had been compelled to leave in a village behind on our march. The Blues took him, and he was shot—shot like a dog, Christophe We revenged him—yes; but what of that? It could not bring our sainted priest back to us again. A little to take away the grief of this news, I may as well tell you that Monsieur de Ker-Gwen* has at least been impartial, for he has made away with thy old father, Matelinn Gourven, as well. It seems that he and that rascal Tonyk, our old lackey, had been hatching blue plots together in our neighbourhood for some time before the final break-up. Tonyk discovered that the klaskervara fellow had not kept honour even among thieves, but had been hoodwinking and trying to steal a march on him. As soon as he dared, therefore, he denounced him to the authorities, and old Matelinn was speedily snuffed out by the guillotine! Richly he deserved it for his murder of my poor father and treatment of you and Uncle Raoul. The Republic practised *égalité* there at all events; and will practise it again before long on Citoyen Postik, as he calls himself, or I am much mistaken; for they say that his day of power

* Death.

is waning, and that he is beginning to be "*suspect.*" To every dog his day, as the proverb has it.

"Christophe, I have mentioned my father, and, having done it, I must just add one thing. Of his conduct to your father and mother, I, his son, would rather not speak. But this I will just say, that, if I can atone to you by a brother's devoted love for all your sufferings, I will do so. May God help me, and have mercy on my poor father's soul! Amen.

"Don't tell mother, but those rascally Blues have sacked and half burned our dear old home, the Château de Kerdec'h. Well, we must hope to build it up again some day; and meantime, when our country is burning, we must not think too much of our houses. Adieu, Christophe—they say the Blues are approaching, and I must lay down the pen for the gun. Kiss the dear ones for me!

"Your Brother,

"AYMON DE KERDEC'H."

Wrapped round these two letters, is a paper, inscribed with the following dates:—

"Christophe de Coëtmor married Genofa Comorre at Saint Heliers, Jersey, Jan., 1794."

———

"Aymon de Kerdec'h arrived in Jersey, after the final defeat of the Royalists, May, 1795."

"Raoul de Kerdec'h, Count de Coëtmor, with his son and daughter and their children, returned to Château Coëtmor in 1814.

"I, Aymon de Kerdec'h, returned at the same time with my mother and sister to live in that part which is still habitable of our poor old Château de Kerdec'h.

"N.B.—If we poor *émigrés* ever become rich enough again, I bequeath it to my descendants to rebuild the Château."

THE END.

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